



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

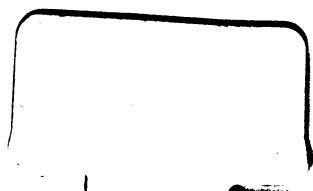
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07497073 6



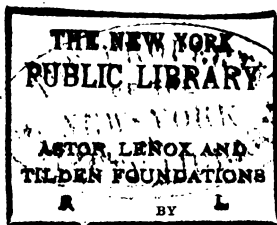
NCW
Chen

CHRONICLES OF ST. MARY'S.

NCW
Chronicle



IRONICLES OF ST. MARY'S.

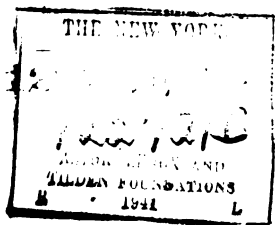


S. D. N.
=

OW SOME TOKEN UPON ME FOR GOOD, THAT THEY WHO HATE ME MAY
T, AND BE ASHAMED; BECAUSE THOU, LORD, HAST HOLPEN ME, AND
RTED ME."

LONDON:
JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET,
AND NEW BOND STREET.
NEW YORK: POTT AND AMERY.

MDCCCLXVIII.

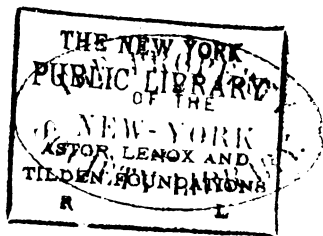


LONDON:
PRINTED BY JOSEPH MASTERS AND SON,
ALDERSGATE STREET.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. Widow Lee's Charge	1
II. Mark's Perplexity	5
III. Mark Staunton goes an errand	8
IV. Folding a Lamb—Morning	15
V. Folding a Lamb—Afternoon	29
VI. Folding a Lamb—Evening	42
VII. Routine at St. Mary's	49
VIII. Lydia's Companions	56
IX. Blue Ribbons and Red	68
X. Visiting Day	80
XI. Lydia's Lucky Sixpence	91
XII. The Monitors	103
XIII. Hints for Monitors	121
XIV. Sympathy	127
XV. Mark's Stockings	141
XVI. What came of them	153
XVII. What Mark did with them	165
XVIII. The 8th of September. The Eve	172
XIX. The Lesson for the Day	180
XX. The Holiday	186
XXI. Michaelmas Day	195
XXII. At Last	205
XXIII. The Decision	217
XXIV. The Great "Case"	222
XXV. How they began it	230
XXVI. How they went on with it	238
XXVII. What came of it	256
XXVIII. Mary's Pupil	277
XXIX. Vocations	286
XXX. <i>Carrie's Offering</i>	300

CHAP.	PAGE
XXXI. The Two Paths	304
XXXII. The Little Cloud	312
XXXIII. The Confirmation	318
XXXIV. Changes	320
XXXV. Lost or Won ?	326
XXXVI. Counsel	334
XXXVII. Taking Advice	341
XXXVIII. Another 8th	347
XXXIX. Miss Mary's News	350
XL. Sister Mabel's Protest	354
XLI. A Hint to a Novice	360
XLII. Another Visiting Day	362
XLIII. Once more at Lowton	371
XLIV. A Dilemma	378
XLV. A Wager	382
XLVI. Mrs. Davis asks a Question	388
XLVII. Very Naughty	392
XLVIII. Sister Mabel's Views	396
XLIX. Sister Mabel's Remedy	400
L. Carrie's Letter	408
LI. The Handmaid of the LORD	414



CHRONICLES OF ST. MARY'S.

CHAPTER I.

WIDOW LEE'S CHARGE.

A TRULY respectable, industrious, hardworking woman had Widow Lee been,—working, working all her life. Working merrily with Mark Staunton, the husband of her youth; working sadly, as his widow, for her only son; working feverishly, unremittingly, to stem off the misery her second husband's drunken habits, slowly but surely developed, brought to the little home, to maintain which she had been tempted to link her fate with his; working desperately, despairingly, as her strength failed more and more; working painfully and uncomplainingly in her second widowhood to pay the debts that were left as her only jointure, and keep herself and her two children from the workhouse. It had been a hard and painful life, but it was well-nigh over now, for Widow Lee lay on her bed upstairs—dying.

Upstairs the widow lay dying, and downstairs her little daughter, on her hands and knees, was vainly endeavouring to coax the fire to burn. Coax as she would, the fire would not burn, but still the child coaxed on. A dirty, slipshod child she was, with hooks and buttons all astray, uncombed hair, unwashed face, and grimy now with charred wood and coal-dust.

Puff once more,—surely it has caught now! no,—for the fifth time out it goes, and her hopes die out too.

"Well, Liddy, how's mother now?" says a big, broad-shouldered fellow who has just unlatched the door.

"Oh, Mark," replied the little one lifting up her face disfigured with smut and tears, "the fire *will* not burn, and mammie wants her tea," and she burst into a fit of weary crying.

"And see the fire don't go out, Liddy, and keep the kettle boiling," added Mark.

Lydia crept rather reluctantly down stairs; she was somewhat spoilt, this little maid, the only survivor out of the second family, and Mark had had a large share in the spoiling. He was too much occupied to play with her now as he used to do, so she was obliged to make the most of him when she could get him, and she wanted to sit on his knee by mother's bedside, and have her share of the tea. However she went down stairs.

"Mark, my boy, my bonny, bonny boy," gasped the dying woman, "I'm going fast now. 'Tain't much longer I'll be here, my own dear boy. Don't cry," she added fondly, as he raised her in his strong arms, and laid her head upon his bosom, while his hot tears fell like rain upon her wasted face. "I shall be better *there*; I sorely needed rest." Her strength failed her, and she paused, but presently she resumed. "It's about Liddy that I want to speak, whilst speak I can. You've always been so good to her, you won't desert her now? O, Mark, promise me you'll be father and mother both to her, the poor motherless lamb." Mark could not promise, he could only sob. "Don't let her be put upon, she's so little, and not strong like; make her life cheery, Mark, while you can; troubles 'll come soon enough, poor dear. Let her have a home, Mark, so that she don't go astray, or marry the first man that asks her for want of one." Poor thing, she was thinking of her own sad fate. "Keep her to school, Mark, and put her out respectable. It's a great charge for you, my boy, but you've been so good to us both."

Her voice died away in an almost inaudible whisper, and silence followed, only broken by Mark's loud weeping. Presently that faint voice spoke once more. "Don't let her forget me, Mark; she's so young, she'll soon forget unless you talk to her about me. Tell her I want her to be a good child, that I shall be waiting for her, that she'll come to me one day; the good LORD will let her come to me."

"We shan't forget you, mother," said Mark hoarsely, "never fear for that, we shall be always talking of you; and there's the little picture of you downstairs, we shall kiss that every day, and so send our love to you. May be the good LORD will let you know we do it."

"I think He will," said the widow simply; "I think He'll let me know how you're getting on, and if the little one is steady; I've no fears for you, but she's such a little one to be without a mother. Say your prayers, Mark, mind, every day, and see Liddy says hers, and I shall be praying for you both,—praying for you both—" and *then her voice died away* in muttered prayers.

She was quite exhausted, Mark laid her gently down; she lay so still he thought more than once that all was over, but presently she opened her eyes, and her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Mark put his ear close to them, and these words came at intervals, 'Love God—Don't forget me—Don't let Liddy forget—Bid her be good—I shall pray—'

"Liddy, Liddy," called Mark, and Liddy ran hastily. But she was too late,—before she reached the top of the stairs she and her brother were motherless.

CHAPTER II.

MARK'S PERPLEXITY.

IF ever there was a man bent on fulfilling to the utmost a promise made to his dying mother, Mark Staunton was that man; but if ever there was a man utterly at a loss as to how that promise was to be carried out, then again, Mark Staunton was he. What to do with Lydia was his one engrossing, perplexing thought from morning to night, and indeed little Lydia Lee was by no means an easy article to dispose of. In the first place, she was, as her mother had said, not strong; and she was nervous and sensitive, as most delicate children are. She was an undersized child of nine years, with a pale face, and large dark wistful eyes; timid and gentle, but wilful withal; hating lessons and sewing; a very gipsy for wandering over hill and dale, with tattered, mud-stained clothes, and tangled hair, returning with a lapful of nuts or blackberries, as a compensation for the dilapidations.

Such a state of things ought not to be, Mark knew, if the little maid was ever to earn a living, or live respectably on any one else's earnings. But it was so difficult to scold her, at least so Mark thought; tender-hearted, foolish Mark: he could not bear to see the little head droop, and the breast heave with sobs, and the large tears rolling from those sweet, dark eyes. But still Liddy could not go gipsying for ever; however enticing the woods and hills might be, she must learn to mend her clothes, and do something useful. So after much deliberation, Mark, about ten days after his mother's funeral, placed Lydia under the care of a neighbour, agreeing to pay six shillings a week for her board, on the distinct understanding *that she was to attend school regularly, and receive motherly care from Mrs. Wickens.* Six shillings was a large sum

for Mark to pay, but he had lately obtained work at a forge with fair wages, and he grudged nothing, in his loving desire to fulfil his mother's charge.

But however promising it might appear at first, the Wickens plan did not answer. In a very short time Mrs. Wickens was full of complaints, and Lydia full of lamentations. The child was a "dirty slut," Mrs. Wickens averred; giving far more than six shillings' worth of trouble. Mrs. Wickens beat her, little Lydia whined, and she did not get enough to eat—she was so hungry. Lydia was most irregular in her attendance at school, complained the school-mistress;—because she was not fit to be seen, said Mrs. Wickens;—because she was kept at home to mind the baby, sobbed Lydia.

Poor Mark was at his wits' end. Angry words passed between him and Mrs. Wickens; and finally Lydia was removed.

Then Mark took a little two-roomed cottage on the edge of the moor, and engaged an old woman to "do" for himself and his sister. For a time, this seemed to answer. If Mark's religion had consisted in love to his mother, Lydia's may be said to have been summed up in love to her brother; and in her joy at being once more under the same roof with him, she suffered herself to be coaxed into regular attendance at school, and tolerable obedience to old Mrs. Thompson. But when the days became long and warm, and every hedgerow was bright with flowers, Lydia's resolutions failed her.

"Hi, Liddy," whispered little Tommy Blisset through the hedge, "I ain't a-going to school—don't you. Come with me, I knows a nest where there's a cuckoo's egg, come and see." Clearly it was impossible to resist going to see and appropriate the cuckoo's egg, so Lydia needed but little persuasion. And when Mark came home that night, her little arms were round his neck, and her soft, pleading eyes raised to his, as she appealed to his own love of fun, frolic, and cuckoo's eggs, whether it was possible to "sit sewing in school such a lovely day!" Mark smiled, but sighed: the little maid was beyond him. It was all wrong, he knew, but what could he do? "Make her life cheery, Mark, while you can," rang in his ears. His good sense told him this idle, aimless, desultory life would lead to no good; that Tommy Blisset was not a safe companion. But how could he mend matters? What could he do?

"Mark Staunton," called the Rector's wife to him one day, as he was mending a lock at the rectory, "I want to speak to you about your little sister." Mark touched his cap, and listened. A hope sprang up within him that Mrs. Dean was going to propound some scheme for Lydia's benefit. "Miss Crisp tells me, Staunton, *that Lydia's appearance is a disgrace to the school, she is never fit*

to be seen, and then she is always playing truant. This must not be; if you cannot make your sister keep the rules of the school, you must remove her."

Mark's heart swelled. "She is motherless," at last he muttered.

"That is nothing to the purpose," replied Mrs. Dean, rather sharply. "Why does not that old woman Thompson look after your sister better? However, I warn you plainly this cannot go on."

"Why don't you get your sister into an orphanage?" said Mrs. Dean's sister, a good-natured elderly lady in spectacles; "Mrs. Thompson is too old to look after a child properly, and it is a great charge for you."

"I'd be quite willing, if it was for the little un's advantage," said poor Mark. "What should I have to pay, ma'am?"

"Pay? oh, nothing; she'd be clothed, boarded, and educated for nothing; and then, when she was old enough, they'd find a respectable situation for her."

"Indeed, ma'am!" exclaimed Mark in astonishment, wondering within himself how it was that any motherless children were wandering about the world, if such elysiums existed. "But where can I find such a place? and how can I get her taken in?"

"Oh, you must first get some hundreds of cards printed, stating your sister's case," said Miss Green; "and then you must get some one to take up the case, and canvass for you."

"Canvass, ma'am?" repeated Mark interrogatively.

"Yes, canvass; that is, write to all the subscribers, and ask for their votes, and then, in about two years, perhaps, if you had any luck, you might get her elected; and then she is off your hands. I don't suppose it would cost more than twenty pounds or so: if you got some one to take up the case who understood about it, perhaps not so much, eh, Lavinia?"

Mrs. Dean, who was appealed to, said, "Perhaps not; only those elections were more trouble than they were worth, and she did not think that after all Mark had mended the lock properly, the key did not seem to turn easily." Mark proved that the lock was all right, and after spending some five minutes in satisfying herself on this point, Mrs. Dean turned away, saying, "Now remember, if your sister does not keep the rules, you must remove her."

"And pray think about getting her into an orphanage," added Miss Green.

"Getting her into an orphanage!" growled Mark, as he walked back to the forge. "Are folks mad! how am I to get twenty pounds, I'd like to know?"

That evening, as Mark went home, Lydia came running to meet him. "Have you been to school?" he questioned sternly, before

the little girl had breath enough to speak. He spoke sternly, because Mrs. Dean's threats filled his mind. "And look what a figure you are; what do you mean by your frock torn this fashion, and look at your shoes down at heel, ain't you ashamed?"

Lydia cowered from his anger, and began to whimper. "Bill Rattles tore it," she said.

"Bill Rattles! what have you to do with such as he? Have you been to school, I say?"

"O, Mark, I did mean to, I did indeed, but I was too late." And then she began to cry, while Mark explained to her the awful pains and penalties that would inevitably follow, if she did not mend her ways, and her clothes.

"Bill Rattles," she began again in excuse, but Mark swore so fiercely at Bill Rattles, that Lydia's tears poured forth in streams, till Mark relented, and wiped them away, and carried her in his arms to the cottage door.

"O, Mark!" whispered Lydia, when they got there, "Mrs. Thompson *is* so queer; I think she's gone crazy, like poor old Davey Cole; do come in and see, she *is* so queer." And Mark went in, and saw plainly enough that the woman who kept his house, and looked after the motherless child, was—tipsy.

CHAPTER III.

MARK STAUNTON GOES AN ERRAND.

IT was very evident that the sooner Mrs. Thompson's services were dispensed with, the better; but then the question arose again, more perplexing than ever, "What is to be done with Lydia?"

"Mark," said the master blacksmith to him a day or two afterwards, as he was silently revolving this question in his mind, for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, "I wish you'd go over to-morrow to Kirkminster, and tell that fellow Grub, if he don't pay his bill, I'll sue him. Ay, that I will, I'll sell him up. I won't wait any longer, do you hear? Tell him you won't stir till you've got the money," and the master wiped his forehead, and swore a good deal at the trouble Master Grub had given him.

Now Grub was a farmer who had left the parish in debt with every one, and Mark was by no means sanguine of bringing the *money back*; but he was glad of the excuse for a long walk; he

should be better able he thought to work out that puzzling problem, "What was to be done with Lydia?" during a long silent walk, with nothing to distract him, than attending to his business at the blacksmith's forge. He wished it had been nearer, that Lydia might have accompanied him, but it was beyond the powers of her little legs; so he saw her safe into school, having smoothed her hair, and pinned up her rents himself, and then set off on his errand.

It was the 11th of June, the Festival of St. Barnabas, the "Son of Consolation;" but of that fact poor Mark was totally ignorant; the probabilities are that he knew nothing of the existence of St. Barnabas, and had never even heard his name: for "the saints our exemplars" were unknown at Lowton, Mark's native place; no church bell ever sounded there, to call the parishioners together to hear the Church's lessons on the lives of the Saints; no preacher's voice ever roused the people to realise the fact that they were all one of that great family of which saints and martyrs now in glory are members too; all soldiers in that great host of which the saints were leaders—all one, though some are on that side of Jordan, and some on this.

"Some of the host have crossed the flood,
And some are crossing now."

To Mark this world was simply a hard, weary, work-a-day world, a world of daily anxieties, and daily toil. He knew nothing of that "great cloud of witnesses," who had worked, and wearied, and struggled too, and who now, living still, though passed from sight, "watch unto prayer," for those who follow after: who, in the rest unspeakable into which they have entered, are still bound by the sacred "communion of saints," to the heavy laden yet on earth; and whose prayers ascend from the hand of the angel standing before the golden altar for their brethren here below.¹ Ah, Mark little deemed his "daily cross" might be "an angel's theme;" perhaps if he had known something of that glorious brotherhood of "saints made perfect," to whom he was linked by his threefold baptismal privileges, he might have thought the world less hard and weary, there might have been some happy exultation in his heart, some glorious thoughts of his high destiny. But no, he knew nothing of the saints in general, or of St. Barnabas, the "Son of Consolation," in particular, and as he plodded on he only thought alternately of Farmer Grub; Mrs. Thompson, and his unlucky little Lydia.

The road to Kirkminster lay at first through shadowy lanes bounded by high hedges, but it was a continual ascent the whole

¹ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

way, and the last deep sandy lane brought him out on to Kirk Common. And there Mark paused for a few minutes to take breath, (for that last hill had been a steep one,) to wipe his hot face, and take a view of the country round him. It was impossible, even for Mark, full as he was of vexatious thoughts about Grub, Thompson, and Lydia, not to be struck with the extreme beauty of the scene. It was a breezy, balmy day, not high summer yet; the deep blue of the sky was relieved by fleecy clouds; the common was all aglow with purple heather, harebells and flowering gorse, and broken here and there by masses of dark grey rock. Behind him lay the dark woodlands stretching far away; and before him, a rich variety of wood, meadow, and arable lands through which the river glistened here and there, bounded by a line of lovely downs, whose soft outlines seemed to melt away into the summer sky.

Mark felt it was beautiful, felt it was soothing, he did not know why; and he sat still a little while and smoked a pipe, and wished Lydia could have walked so far. Then on he went again; sometimes down hill, sometimes up, till he came to a second common called St. John's, on the further edge of which lay Kirkminster, and somewhere in whose vicinity lived Grub the farmer.

Kirk Common had been quiet and solitary enough, but there was more life here on St. John's. A band of children were playing some little way off, and their shouts and laughter reached Mark where he stood. There lay the town; here, there, and everywhere farms and homesteads nestled among their orchards and rickyards, and not far off stood a large pile of buildings partially bounded by walls; a red brick building, handsome and substantial, coped with stone; and surmounted by a belfry from which a large bell began presently to ring.

The bell in the belfry began to ring, and the children, whose merry voices Mark had long heard, came tumbling through the gorse, and climbing up the hollows; and finally mustering their forces fell into marching order, two and two, and came merrily down the path on which Mark was standing, making their way, evidently, towards the building with the bell.

Mark watched them with intense interest. They were all girls; some thirty or forty girls; from apparently six or seven to fifteen, dressed all alike in neat print frocks, brown-holland capes and brown bonnets. Mark gazed with delight at their bright rosy faces, and neat dresses, and then thought of his Lydia with a sigh. The children laughing and chattering passed on, followed by two ladies dressed in black, and Mark, keeping them in sight, saw them finally disappear through a gate in one of the surrounding walls of *the building*; by which time the bell had ceased to ring.

"Now that's a girls' school," was Mark's sagacious observation to himself, and he began to wonder whether it was one of those orphanages of which Miss Green had spoken: and whether it was within the bounds of possibility that poor little Lydia could ever gain entrance there. "How merry, and well, and clean they look," thought Mark with a sigh; and then he went on to discover the whereabouts of Farmer Grub.

Now whether Farmer Grub paid his debt like an honest man, or got rid of Mark by fair speeches and promises, this history sayeth not, but one thing is certain, that Mark did at last leave Tod's Hole Farm, where Mr. Grub lived, and walked briskly, with the air of a man who had got a disagreeable business off his mind, in the direction of the red brick building.

"What's you?" he inquired of a man breaking stones in the road, jerking his head towards the edifice in question.

The stonebreaker took time to answer, surveying his questioner carefully first, then replied, "They calls un St. Mary's Home."

"What's that?"

"Kind o' workus, I reckon."

"A workus!" exclaimed Mark in great disgust, yet doubtfully, "be them young lasses in brown bonnets, workus girls?"

"No, they's orphans," said the man.

"Orphans," thought Mark, "then it is an orphanage. How do the orphans get there?" he inquired aloud.

"I knows nothing on it," replied the man, and he went on breaking stones.

Mark looked round for some better information, but as no one else was near, and time was precious, he offered his new acquaintance some of his tobacco, and thus elicited that he believed the building contained a hospital, an asylum for incurable persons, as well as the orphanage, and that the whole institution was under the care and management of "Sisters of Mercy." Mark had no notion whatever what that might mean, but he thought it a pleasant sounding name; so pleasant that he conceived the idea of venturing up to the house on a voyage of discovery, and making inquiries for himself.

The stonebreaker directed him to an entrance-gate which he said led to the orphanage, and Mark passing in, paused to consider what he should do next. Just then he caught sight of two little brown figures running towards a portion of the building that stood somewhat apart from the rest, though connected with it by what appeared a long covered passage. Into a porch covered with creepers ran the little girls, and through a door passed quickly out of sight; but into the porch Mark followed, and finding the door

closed, rang the bell. It was answered by a young girl, some fifteen or sixteen years of age, and Mark was at first too much taken up with her appearance to reply immediately to her inquiries as to what he wanted.

The young portress was a blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, rather tanned and freckled, but fresh and rosy. She was dressed in a brown frock, with a small white collar, a white apron, and a little cap tied with light blue ribbons; and round her neck suspended from a ribbon, the same hue and shade as her cap-strings, hung a medal, which greatly excited Mark's curiosity.

"Be this the orphanage, Miss?" asked he very respectfully.

"Yes," laughed the girl, "but I'm not 'Miss,' I'm one of the orphans."

Mark was delighted. Would Lydia ever look like that? "Well, how can I get my little sister in here?"

"Oh, if you've come to make inquiries, this is the wrong door," said the girl. "You must go to the principal entrance; see, that door under the great porch: you must ring there and ask for the Superior, and she'll tell you everything."

Mark thanked her, and prepared to obey. "Is she very little?" asked the girl, alluding to the little sister.

"She's just nine, but she's a little thing," said Mark, "and motherless."

"Ah! and fatherless?"

"Yes, better luck for her," growled Mark, thinking of the drunkard in his untimely grave.

"Ah!" said the portress again, in a tone of commiseration; "Well, I hope you'll get her in, she'll be happy here, I know."

"You'd be kind to her, wouldn't you?" said Mark earnestly.

"Oh, yes indeed," was the fervent response; and then, evidently thinking she had said enough to an entire stranger, the little maid nodded smilingly, and shut the door.

Such was Mark Staunton's interview with Caroline Saunders, head monitress and portress at St. Mary's Orphanage, and with greatly excited hopes, he now rang the bell at the principal entrance under the great porch. A grave, middle-aged woman, dressed in grey, opened to him there. "To see the Superior, did you say? well, step in here, and I'll see if she's at liberty;" and she ushered him into a small waiting-room near the entrance and left him. She was really only gone ten minutes, but it seemed an age to Mark as he fidgeted up and down the room, examining the cross over the chimney-piece, the ornamental alms' box on the table, and the few Scripture prints that hung against the wall. At the end of ten minutes the portress re-entered to tell him the Superior would be

with him directly, and almost before she had delivered the message the lady in question entered the room. She was a slight, delicate-looking woman, rather past middle age, with a grave sweet face, deeply lined, as though with care and trouble. It lighted up with a kind pleasant smile however as she greeted Mark, and then, with graceful courtesy, she bade him be seated and tell her all he wanted. With a little help and encouragement, Mark poured forth all his tale, and the tears stood in his honest eyes as he ended with "How do folk get their orphans into this here orphanage, ma'am?"

"Well, they apply to us and state their case, as you have done," replied the Superior; "and then if there is a vacancy, we undertake the charge of the child for a certain yearly payment. Some we have—several I may say—for whom nothing is paid, but they are children who have, directly or indirectly, some claim upon us. Now your little sister has none; are you disposed to make any payment for her?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," replied Mark eagerly; "I paid Mother Wickens six shillings a week for her. Would six shillings a week be enough?" he added anxiously.

"You need not pay so much, we will take her for four. Could you manage to pay four shillings a week for your sister?"

"Indeed I could, ma'am, and thankfully," said Mark rising, the better to express his gratitude; "but should I have to get cards printed, ma'am, and all that?" he added, remembering Miss Green.

"Oh, no, we have no canvassing here."

Mark's spirits rose, "And about her clothes, ma'am; what should I have to pay for them?"

"Nothing, that is all included."

"Nothing!" repeated Mark in amaze; "and for schooling, ma'am?"

"Nothing again," replied the Superior, smiling; "the four shillings a week will include everything. Your sister will cost you nothing more the whole time she remains here. But stay," she added, checking Mark who was about to express his grateful delight, "I have been a little too fast, I fear; your account of your little sister interested me so much that I forgot we must first ascertain if there is a vacancy." Mark's hopes died out. It was too good a thing to be for him, he murmured to himself. The Superior rang the bell, and desired the portress to send Sister Mabel to her.

"Sister Mabel is the Head of the Orphanage," she explained to Mark. "She will tell us if she has room;" and in a very few moments Sister Mabel stood before them.

Mark gazed upon the "Head of the Orphanage" with deep

interest, feeling all his hopes of Lydia's future wellbeing depended upon her.

The very first glance inspired him with confidence. He saw a lady somewhat past her prime, on whom time, however, had left no traces of care. She was about middle height, and plump and round. Her close white cap surrounded a face,—not beautiful, perhaps, but, bright with that beauty which a glad, loving spirit sheds over the most ordinary features. Not that Sister Mabel's features were altogether ordinary. Judges of beauty said Sister Mabel was plain, and they were doubtless right; and persons who were *not* judges of beauty said she was lovely, and they were certainly right too. Her brow was smooth and open, and though her face was a little too round, and her features irregular, yet her eyes would have redeemed a far plainer face from ugliness—they were large, deep, blue eyes, *violet-blue*, as some people call them; eyes clear and bright as an infant's, that were sometimes full of laughter, and sometimes full of woe, but the laughter and the woe were always the overflowings of her loving, sympathizing heart. They laughed with the rejoicing, they wept with the sad, they darkened with earnest thoughts, they sparkled with sunny cheerfulness; looking into Sister Mabel's face, it seemed as if her pure and gentle soul was shining through her eyes upon you, and sunshine seemed to follow her wherever she came; the very room seemed lightened by her presence. She did not bustle or fuss, but her step was light and active, and her every movement decided and quick. Her smile won Mark's heart in an instant, and he noticed, as everyone else noticed who observed Sister Mabel, that when she smiled, she seemed to smile all over—forehead, eyes, and lips; even her little plump white hands seemed dimpled with smiles. Such was the Sister selected by the Authorities of St. Mary's, as the mother of the motherless; such the guardian of Lydia's future career.

The Superior explained Mark's errand, and Sister Mabel proceeded to consider whether room could be made for the little candidate. After some calculation as to who should sleep in this bed, and who could be moved into that, it was finally decided that it could be done, and that Mark might bring his sister whenever he pleased.

"Might it be next Sunday?" he asked, as he could not leave his work on other days.

"Sunday by all means," was the reply. And then Mark tried again to express his gratitude and happiness, but failed; and Sister Mabel covered his confusion by kind remarks and inquiries about the orphan girl. A misgiving crossed Mark's mind that perhaps Lydia's dilapidated appearance and wilful ways might create a pre-

judice against her in that abode of cleanliness and order, and he paused at the front door to plead earnestly for the motherless child. But there was no need. "I know, I know," said Sister Mabel cheerfully, "you need not tell me how little plants run to seed without a mother's care, she will very soon fall into good ways; that is if there is any *love* in her, and I am sure she is affectionate," continued she, looking full into Mark's anxious face, ("if she is your sister," added she mentally.)

"That she is," exclaimed Mark eagerly, "and I dare say, ma'am, she'll fret a bit at first at leaving me; I've had to do with her ever since she was born a'most, ma'am."

"I pray God she may live to repay your loving care a hundred-fold," said the Sister deeply touched. 'There was something to her most beautiful in this strong man's love for his helpless orphan sister. "Come and see her every visiting day,—that is the first Sunday or Monday in every month, and I trust you will soon have reason to be pleased with her progress and good conduct."

"Thank you, lady."

"Sister."

"Sister?" repeated Mark shyly.

"Yes, I am called Sister Mabel; call me Sister when you speak to me, and I hope I may soon prove myself a Sister indeed to you and Lydia."

"God bless you, ma'am," exclaimed Mark fervently; "but to take such a liberty as that, is what I never could do!"

Then thinking he had perhaps said something he should not, he begged her pardon, and blundered out of the door: striding back to Lowton as if a whole mountain of care had been removed from his mind. Sister Mabel looked after him as he left the house, and when he was out of sight turned thoughtfully back into the waiting-room, where she stood for a few moments praying in her heart for these two orphans, and for Grace to be guided rightly in her dealings with them.

CHAPTER IV.

FOLDING A LAMB—MORNING.

"GOING to send thee to the Sisters o' Marcy! he ought to be ashamed o' hisself." So spoke Mrs. Blisset, the mother of Lydia's friend Tommy, to whom the little girl had communicated, with some misgivings, her brother's intentions towards her.

Lydia was standing in Mrs. Blisset's kitchen, her eyes round with fright, and several neighbours had dropped in to hear the news, and make their comments.

"I'm glad on it," exclaimed Mrs. Wickens, Lydia's former guardian, "I knew he'd find yer out afore you'd done. So he's tired of yer, is he? And well he may be! an idle, aggravatin' little slut."

Lydia began to howl; and good-natured Mrs. Rattles interposed, "But it's a shame too, Mrs. Wickens, for to send that poor motherless child to the workus. I say it's a shame."

"Oh, it ain't the workus," said Lydia through her tears, her pride taking alarm at the odious word. "It's a boarding school, Mark says, and he's going to pay four shillings a week for me."

"Humph," grunted Mrs. Wickens, "we all know about that. I knows all about them Sisters o' Marcy; if ever you gets in there you'll never get out as long as you live. Bless you, they'll lock you up in a dark cellar and give you nothing to eat but dry bread and cabbage stalks, and whip you every day till you can't stand, and serve you right too, I say."

Lydia's cries became dismal, and the neighbours murmured their indignation. "They're the wickedest creatures going, them Sister o' Marcy," continued Mrs. Wickens quite delighted with the sensation she had caused; "they get's these here poor children into the house and makes money by them, and then they beats and starves them till they die, and then they gets more money out of the family for to bury them, and puts them into the ground like dogs, and pockets the money theirselves."

"What ever's come to Mark that he should send the child there?" exclaimed Mrs. Rattles. "Ah, Liddy, lass, you've tired him out, may be, what a pity it was you didn't make yourself easy with Mrs. Wickens."

"She'll be glad enough to get back to me when she's been there a day I take it," observed Mrs. Wickens, "she'll know then when she was well off."

"Why don't he send her to the workus at once?" inquired Mrs. Blisset.

"That's just his pride," replied Mrs. Pips, the clerk's wife. "Them Stauntons was always too proud to look at the ground they stepped on. Don't you hear he calls it a 'boarding school,' and he's going to pay four shillings a week, quite genteel? A pretty boarding school she'll find it; not much board I take it, ha, ha!"

"Sure, some one ought to speak to the rector about it, or to the magistrates," suggested Mrs. Blisset, "it ought to be put a stop to; it's right awful."

Lydia turned her dark wistful eyes from one to the other of the speakers, vainly seeking for some ray of comfort and encouragement.

"I'd run away if I was you, Liddy," said Tommy indignantly.

"Small blame to her if she did," said Mrs. Pips. "Why, ma'am," she continued, turning to Mrs. Blisset, "I've heard a deal about these Sisters of Mercy. I once went with Mr. Pips to a meeting about them. Mrs. Dean's brother, Mr. Green, and a lot of other gentlefolk spoke most beautiful. You should have heard the names they called them. It was lovely. One gentleman said they got people in there, young girls and such like, and buried them alive, built them up in the walls with bricks and mortar, he said, and got packing-cases and put them in and buried them under the ground after they'd whipped them to death."

"Lawks!" exclaimed the whole assembly; and Lydia's blood froze in her veins, and her tears dried up from sheer horror.

"I remember that very well," said Mrs. Wickens, "it was all in the papers, my master read it out to me."

"But do you think it could be true?" said Mrs. Rattles doubtfully.

"True!" exclaimed Mrs. Wickens and Mrs. Pips with one voice, "Why it was Mr. Pewlegate the member of Parliament that said it; and then," continued Mrs. Pips, "there was Mr. Squally, he's a member of Parliament too, who said as how all the girls that didn't die went raving mad; and they said that the perlice ought for to go through the houses, and take the poor things out of the cellars where they'd put 'em, and that all these here wicked Sisters of Mercy ought for to be put an end to."

"Ah, that they ought, I can't think how such things are done in England," remarked Mrs. Blisset thoughtfully.

"And don't you remember, Mrs. Pips," Mrs. Wickens went on, "how Mr. Pewlegate said as how the girls was chained up like wild beasts, with great locks and bars on the door, and the windows grated up, and they never put their foot outside the door from one year's end to another?"

"Ah, that I do," replied Mrs. Pips, and after that the recollections of both ladies became more and more abundant; till they fairly talked themselves out of breath and then went home to tea.

Mrs. Blisset, a good-natured slatternly woman with a tribe of dirty children, tried to comfort Lydia, by keeping her to tea, and promising that she would speak to Mark, and persuade him to let her stay where she was.

"And tell him I will be good, I will be good indeed," sobbed the little girl, "Oh, I will go to school, I will indeed."

Mrs. Blisset took the child on her knee, and wiped her dirty, tear-stained face with her still dirtier pinafore, and whispered hope in her ear that after all Mark was only frightening her to make her more steady. This seemed a very reasonable and comfortable view of the subject to Lydia. She could not believe that Mark, her own Mark, would send his Liddy to such a dreadful place, however naughty she had been, and she took her leave of Mrs. Blisset at last, much cheered and tranquillised.

But Mark soon made it evident, that he was very much in earnest, and he became provoked at his neighbours' interference, and at Lydia's pertinacious refusal to hear one word about the little girls in brown, the portress with the blue ribbon, and kind Sister Mabel; so his voice was quite sharp and stern when on Sunday morning he bade her get ready to accompany him to Kirkminster. He sauntered out whilst waiting for her, and stood for some time leaning over the bridge watching the stream flowing on and on, and thinking of his own past life, and his and Lydia's future.

At last he began to wonder why Lydia did not appear, and returning to the cottage, found the little girl was missing, and old Mrs. Thompson quite unable to tell where she was gone to. She thought, she said, that she had already started with Mark. Mark was now really angry. This came, he growled, of the neighbours' ill-natured gossip; however he wasted no words on Mrs. Thompson, but started immediately in pursuit of the little truant. His search all the morning was in vain, and he was beginning to be alarmed at her absence, when late in the afternoon he came suddenly upon her crouching with Tommy Blisset and Bill Rattles in a well concealed hollow, in Mudley Wood, about two miles from Lowton. A feast was spread before them of bread and cheese, and two empty ginger-beer bottles showed they had been pic-nicking in style.

The outraged Mark relieved his feelings by boxing the boys' ears soundly, and leaving them both howling dismally over the remains of their entertainment, he carried Lydia off in his strong arms, scolding her heartily the whole way. Lydia was frightened, and whined and cried, but she had a spring of consolation in her heart which would have enabled her to bear even a worse fate than Mark's rebukings. She knew it was too late then to start for Kirkminster, and that Mark could not leave his work during the week; so she was safe for another six days certain; and who could tell what methods of escape might not present themselves during a space of six days? Mark himself might relent, especially if she mended her frock, and went to school regularly every day that week; at any rate something would turn up, she was certain, to set this hated *Sister of Mercy* scheme aside; it was not possible that Mark would

ever send her from him. So she bore her scolding meekly, went to bed and slept soundly.

The next day she watched Mark off to his work, and then having made herself as tidy as she could, she prepared to start for school. But here a difficulty presented itself. Her bonnet had but one string, and the other she could nowhere find. Well, she would go without a bonnet, she thought, other girls did so, why not she? So off she set, bonnetless, cloakless, and with shoes down at heel, but, (having mended her frock,) quite satisfied with her appearance. It was rather a windy day, and long before she reached the school, which stood by the side of the high road to Kirkminster, her hair was blown in wild confusion over her face, and she looked more like some tramp's child than a tidy village maiden. Little disturbed by this, however, she sauntered easily along, and had just come within sight of the school-house, when hasty steps behind her made her look round, and to her surprise she saw Mark coming down the road after her. Pleased that he should see her mended frock, and that she was really bound schoolward, she ran towards him and into his arms. But his first address was rather rough, "What are you doing here without a bonnet? where are you going to such a figure as that, I'd like to know?"

"To school, Mark," replied the little girl plaintively, "and I've sewn up my frock, see; but the string is off my bonnet, and I couldn't find it; and I've lost the button off my cloak, and I hadn't a pin, so it wouldn't fasten; but I'm in good time for school," she added, looking up in his face with eyes as meekly imploring as a little dog's, sure that that would be excuse sufficient for any deficiencies in her toilet.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Mark, "there's no time to go back now, so you must come with me just as you are. And a nice figure you are, I must say. But come along now, I've no time to lose."

"Come where, Mark?" said Lydia, drawing back in fear, as her brother laid hold of her hand.

"To Kirkminster," was the unexpected reply, "Master's given me leave to take you to-day as I was baulked yesterday, and there's no time to lose, as I must be back early."

Lydia burst into a passionate wail of despairing grief, but Mark took her up in his arms, and deaf to all her prayers and tears, walked steadily on, without pause or speech, till he halted at last, hot and breathless on the edge of Kirk Common, and putting her down upon the soft springy turf, seated himself as before, on a boulder of rock to rest. As before, he lighted his pipe, and smoked till all irritation had passed from his mind; then returning it to

his pocket, he lifted up the still wailing child, stroked back her hair, and fondly kissed her face.

"Poor little maid," he said, "she thinks me a brute, I know; but it's all for your good, Liddy, as you'll see when you get to that big house. Such a beautiful house, Liddy, such lots of little girls to play with, and everything so clean and handsome."

But Lydia thought of the bolts and bars, the whippings and cabbage stalks, and above all of the living entombments, and her grief broke out afresh. Something she said of her dreadful anticipations, and Mark as he led her tenderly by the hand over the pleasantest and easiest paths of the common, strove with all his eloquence to disabuse her mind of these terrible imaginations. He could not conjure them away, however, but one good thing arose out of his representations;—Lydia perceived he still loved her, that he was not sending her away in anger as a punishment for her wilfulness, which had been her grief of griefs, and as he talked on so hopefully and lovingly, she clung closer to the strong brown hand which held hers, and began to trust with all the faith of her child's heart in the wisdom and kindness of her brother's love.

She had not only ceased weeping, but had begun to prattle and smile long before they reached the second heath which lay between Kirk Common and the town. She had gathered handfuls of heather and blue-bells, had chased sundry butterflies, and run several races with Mark, before his exclamation, "See, Liddy, there's the place, ain't it a fine house now?" made her heart beat with fear once more, and brought her, again cowed and trembling, to his side. She said not a word, however, as they crossed the heath; not a word as they passed the gate of that dreaded dungeon; but she clung closer and closer as they entered the awful porch, and cried with terror at the sound of the bell that swung responsive to Mark's touch.

The same grave elderly portress answered the door, and Mark observed with some dismay the look of astonishment she cast on the tear-stained travel-worn little object by his side. She invited them gravely in, and ushering them into the waiting parlour, said she would fetch Sister Mabel.

And now Lydia's grief broke out with fresh vehemence, and nothing that Mark could say or do served to stay the passion of sobs which seemed to shake her little frame to pieces. She was clinging, convulsively weeping, to Mark's breast when Sister Mabel entered, greatly concerned to find her new charge in such a lamentable state.

She sat down and spoke cheerfully to Mark, and kindly at and *of poor little Lydia*, and as she talked she observed both closely,

and thought she had never seen a greater contrast than that brother and sister presented. Mark tall, broad-shouldered, with round good-humoured face, fair hair, and open blue eyes; and in spite of his grimy calling neat and smart in his appearance; and poor little Lydia pale and fragile, with long dark tangled hair, dark mournful eyes, dishevelled, slatternly, neglected. She was paler, and more dilapidated looking now than ever, for her dress was covered with dust and she was almost ill with weeping. Mark's eyes were full of tears as he rose to leave his little sister in her new abode, but he had no misgivings. The child clung passionately to him, "O take me back, Mark, take me back, I will be good, dear Mark, I will be good."

He folded her in his arms, but his voice failed as he tried to cheer her. "She's such a little one," he pleaded apologetically to Sister Mabel.

The Sister nodded kindly, "She will soon be better," she observed, "best leave her quietly: if she is not content to stay when you come and see her Sunday three weeks, I shall advise her being removed; but the sooner you leave her now the better." And so disengaging his coat from her grasp Mark escaped through the front door, crying heartily, poor fellow, as he bent his steps homeward, but quite satisfied that he had done what was best for the motherless child.

So Mark was gone, and Lydia throwing herself on the floor wept as if she would never be comforted.

Sister Mabel quietly rang the bell. "Send Caroline here," she said to the portress, and presently in came the fair-haired girl who had opened the orphanage door to Mark on the occasion of his first visit.

"Carrie," said Sister Mabel, "here is a very disconsolate little maid; take her away and make her comfortable. Her name is Lydia."

"Why, Lydia," said Carrie stepping forward immediately, "why you poor little thing, what ever is the matter with you? Look up and kiss me, there's a dear."

The sweet girlish tones arrested Lydia's attention; she raised her tear-swollen eyes; the dreaded "Sister" had disappeared, only Carrie was there holding her in her arms, and gazing on her with eyes full of pity and love. The child checked her sobs, and throwing her arms round her new friend's neck, exclaimed, "Oh Mark, Mark, I want to go home with Mark."

"Is Mark your brother?" asked Carrie, and then she led the child on to tell her little tale, soothing and caressing her all the while. "Ah, then don't cry any more, Mark will come back on

visiting day, that will be in three weeks. Think how soon that will be gone, and then if you are not happy, he'll take you back I'm sure. Come now with me, and I'll wash your face, and smooth your hair, and make you comfortable."

It was impossible to resist her winning voice, and Lydia suffered her to raise and lead her away. They passed out of the waiting-room, through various passages, and at length reached a room more wonderful and awful than Lydia could have imagined. Long rows of basons were ranged down each side, towels and brushes, and other instruments of torture as they seemed to her, hung in every direction. She kept fast hold of Carrie's hand.

"This is our lavatory," said Carrie, "where we wash and dress, and this," she added, leading Lydia up to a frightful abyss, "is our bath; it's such fun, I'll show you how we fill it, it will wash all the dust off you in no time."

She showed Lydia how to turn the taps, talking merrily all the time. It seemed a fearful operation to Lydia, but she could not feel so very much frightened, looking into Carrie's bright face, and holding her hand all the while. But when the bath was sufficiently filled and heated, and Carrie suggested to Lydia that she should take off her clothes and get into it, then her terrors recommenced indeed.

"I shall be drowned, I shall be drowned," she screamed.

"Drowned! nonsense. You can't think how nice it is. I'll show you how to get in. See, swing yourself round so, and drop in gently. Oh, it is so nice."

Thus encouraged, Lydia submitted; she gave one dismal screech as she touched the water, but after she had been in a little while was willing to confess it was not so disagreeable.

"It's beautiful," said Carrie enthusiastically, "and now look here; see, these are your new clothes; aren't they nice?"

Yes, new clothes are always nice, and these were nicer than any Lydia had ever had; she was quite content that Carrie should array her in them.

"Now wait a bit," said Carrie, drawing forth a portentous pair of scissors, "let me shorten your hair a little, it will be ever so much easier to keep neat and clean;" and before Lydia could make any objection, her long elf-locks had disappeared, and her hair nicely brushed and combed was arranged in smooth short braids behind her ears. Her toilet was finished at last, and a novel sensation of being perfectly clean, and well dressed, with a sense of rest and comfort, caused her to look up smilingly in Carrie's face.

"Oh, I feel so nice," she said, "do I look nice?"

"*Charming,*" said Carrie.

"As nice as you?" asked Lydia, looking admiringly on her gentle attendant.

"Oh, quite as nice," replied Carrie confidently; "And now help me clear up," she added; and Lydia, pleased to be occupied, cleared up under Carrie's directions, and by the time everything was made straight, felt surprisingly at home.

"And now," said Carrie, rolling Lydia's cast off garments into a neat little bundle ready for removal, "we'll go into the school-room. You need not be frightened," she continued, observing the little girl's scared look; no one will hurt you; they'll be about ending school; you keep close to me, and I'll tell you where to go, and what to do."

Lydia did keep close, very close to her new companion, who leaving the lavatory conducted her along the same passage they had before traversed, till they came to an arched door. This Carrie opened softly, and Lydia stood for the first time in the presence of all her companions.

The St. Mary's schoolroom was a pleasant, lofty room with an open roof; on one side it was lighted by three large windows, wide open now, and shaded from the glare of the summer sun by green curtains flapping lazily to and fro in a pleasant June breeze. The walls were decorated with maps and prints; at both ends were large open fireplaces with high stone chimneypieces; over one was carved a cross with the legend in coloured letters, "Conquer by this," above the other in a niche stood a statuette of the Virgin Mother, with her hands meekly folded on her breast, beneath which were these words, cut into the stone and richly coloured in blue and red and gold, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word." Several doors led to different parts of the building, they were all arched, and over each was an illuminated text of Scripture; texts of Scripture moreover, were painted all round the room immediately below the spring of the roof. Against the wall, opposite the centre window stood a high desk at which sat Sister Mabel, above it hung a picture of the Holy Child JESUS working in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, with the text over it, "He was subject unto them." On the same side of the room were also pictures of the principal events of our LORD's History, alternating with maps, and other necessary adjuncts of a schoolroom; and over one door, which led, as Lydia afterwards found, into the long covered way or cloister connecting the orphanage with the rest of the Home, hung a large engraving of the Crucifixion, under which were the words, "By whose death ye are saved."

It must not be supposed that Lydia took in all the details here described of the St. Mary's schoolroom on this her first entry.

She was conscious of nothing, poor little maid, but that she was standing in a very large room, full of desks and children, and that several dozen pairs of eyes were furtively glancing at her over books and slates.

Sister Mabel had looked up and nodded kindly to her as she and Carrie entered, but she took no further notice, and very shortly afterwards rang a small bell, on which all the scholars rose to their feet, and at the Sister's signal sang to a lively thrilling melody the following hymn.

"Glory be to JESU,
Who in bitter pains
Poured for us the life-blood
From His sacred veins.

Grace and life eternal
In that blood I find ;
Blest be His compassion
Infinitely kind.

Blest through endless ages
Be the precious stream,
Which from endless torments
Did the world redeem.

Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies ;
But the blood of JESUS
For our pardon cries.

Oft as it is sprinkled
On our guilty hearts,
Satan in confusion
Terror-struck departs.

Oft as earth exulting
Wafts its praise on high,
Angel hearts rejoicing
Make their glad reply.

Lift ye then your voices ;
Swell the mighty flood ;
Louder still and louder
Praise the precious blood. Amen."

The LORD's Prayer followed, a collect, and the Grace : and then at another signal, each class walked in order past the Sister's desk (or rostrum) curtsying to her as they passed. A monitor threw open a door on the window side of the room which led into a playground, partly gravel, partly grass, and as each girl passed the *threshold she sprang* forward with a shout and a bound that showed

how delightful was the relaxation of voice and limb, after three hours' attention in school. The schoolroom was soon emptied of all but Sister Mabel who returned to her rostrum, the monitors who remained to clear up, and Lydia who still clung fast to Carrie's gown.

In the centre of the playground stood a "giant stride," and towards this the screaming laughing children rushed as if their very lives depended on its gyrations, while a few quiet and curious ones lingered about the door to make their observations on the new comer.

The new comer was cleaning slates under Carrie's direction, when Sister Mabel looked up from some writing on which she had been engaged, and leaving the rostrum sat down upon a monitor's chair, and called the little girl to her.

Lydia came forward shyly, and had not courage at first to raise her eyes to the Sister's face. The kind cheerful tones of her voice, however, assured her at last, and as she looked into those dark blue eyes that were gazing so lovingly upon her, her fears grew less and less, the Sister's arm closed round her, and soon she was answering readily all her questions, describing her journey, detailing her life at Lowton, describing her mother's death, and Mark's perfections.

"You must love your brother Mark very dearly," observed Sister Mabel gravely. "What a fortunate little girl you are to have so kind a brother; have you ever thanked God for him?"

No, Lydia had never thought of that.

"Then you should," continued the Sister, "it is not every brother who would work so hard, and spend four shillings a week out of his wages to get his little sister taught and trained."

Lydia's eyes filled with tears, "I love him dearly," she whispered.

"I am sure you do, and so you will do everything you can think of to please him. You will do all you can to repay his kindness to you. You will be so diligent with your lessons, because he pays for them; you will take such pains with your needlework, because then you will be able to make yourself useful to him; you will be cheerful and happy here, because it would grieve and disappoint him if you were cross and gloomy and discontented."

Quiet tears trickled down Lydia's cheeks. "I will try, I will be good," she muttered.

"I am sure you will. And in three weeks, think, Mark will be coming to see how his little girl is getting on. Now you will be able to do a good deal in three weeks to please him. How delighted he will be if he finds that you are merry and happy and have already

made progress. Let me see what you can do? what do you know? Can you read?"

"A little," replied Lydia, and very little it proved to be. It also transpired that she could make all her letters upon a slate, but that she could not spell; that she knew two and two made four, and that five and five made ten, because she could find that out by her fingers, but that she could make no calculations beyond the compass of her four fingers and two thumbs. Of needlework Lydia confessed she knew little indeed, and that little she heartily hated.

"That's a pity," said Sister Mabel, "I would take great pains with it though, if I were you, whether you like it or not, because it will make you so useful to Mark. Only think how nice it would be if you could make and mend his clothes for him."

"It would be very nice," said Lydia smiling.

It was wonderful how fast her fears were disappearing, and her hopes and spirits rising.

"Well, now you must go into the playground," said the Sister, "it is too fine to stay in doors. Carrie is busy and cannot go with you, but you shall not be alone among strangers, I will find a friend for you who will tell you everything, and introduce you to every one, and see that you come to no harm. Carrie, call Rose."

Carrie called, and a few hops, skips and bounds brought a dark-eyed, glowing, laughter-loving little maid of twelve years old into the Sister's presence.

"Rose, this is Lydia Lee, your new companion. Lydia, this is Rose Berger, who will explain the rules to you, and take care of you till you are as much at home here as herself."

Lydia looked with happy confidence into Rose's bright face, and made up her mind that she should love her dearly.

"Take her into the playground, Rose, and see no one teases her, she has never been away from home before, and is shy and strange."

"Oh! I'll take care of her, Sister," laughed Rose, "never fear. Come along, Lydia, we are having such fun."

"But don't tire her," Sister Mabel called after them, as the two girls walked off with their arms round each other's waist. "She has had a long walk this morning, Rose, all the way from Lowton."

"Oh, but Mark carried me half the way," said Lydia, who had now quite found her tongue, "I am not very tired. I am sure I shall love you very much," she added, as Rose stopped to kiss her outside the door.

"Now be off," said Rose authoritatively, to the few children *already mentioned*, who had been watching about the entrance, to

make Lydia's acquaintance. "This is a new child, and she mustn't be teased or bothered." So saying, she led the "new child" in triumph through the discomfited watchers, and seating her on a grassy bank, under a tree at one end of the playground, placed herself at her side, saying, "Now here we shall be quite comfortable, and you can look at them playing without tiring yourself; and I'll tell you everything about everybody."

In accordance with the liberal offer, Rose began by telling Lydia all about herself, claiming Lydia's history in return. Rose had no father or mother, she said, a fact she stated with perfect indifference. She supposed she had had once, but she knew nothing about them.

Had she brothers or sisters, Lydia inquired.

No, nobody at all; not a relation in the world that she knew of. Lydia thought this rather shocking and pitiable, but her bereaved condition had no depressing influence on Rose. St. Mary's had been her home ever since she could remember, she said. "At least, not exactly St. Mary's, I used to be down at that little house yonder, do you see it? there—covered with a vine? that's called St. Joseph's Cottage, and it's where all the little wee orphans live with Sister Fanny; they don't come in here with us till they're turned seven. So I used to be there first, of course."

And then she explained to Lydia that this large mass of buildings on which she was gazing, consisted of different and distinct establishments, each designated by a different name; though when spoken of collectively, the whole was generally called "St. Mary's," for shortness' sake.

"See, that with the tower, is the Sisters' own house, where they live, it is called 'the House of St. Mary and St. John;' that large roof is the Chapel; that's dedicated to St. John—the 'beloved Disciple,' you know; then that,—look, stand up—away there, that's the Convalescent Hospital; it's called 'St. Luke's Hospital;'—St. Luke was a Doctor, you know;"—but Lydia did not know anything about him; "then on the other side, where you see that bow window and all those roses, that's 'St. Barnabas' Home;' it's for poor sick people that can never get well,—isn't that shocking?—only think of never getting well! then, this is called 'St. Mary's Orphanage;' and the little white house is 'St. Joseph's Cottage;' and Mr. Neville, the Chaplain, he lives in that small house with the green blinds, close by St. Luke's Hospital." All these details Rose pointed out, standing on the top of the grass bank at the end of the playground; informing Lydia moreover, that, with the exception of the inmates of 'St. Joseph's Cottage,' the dwellers in all these different Homes and Hospitals could meet in the great central Chapel *without going out of doors*: each separate building

being connected with the 'Mother House' by a long covered way, or 'Cloister.'

The whole erection was, as Lydia afterwards—long afterwards—discovered, in the form of a Latin Cross;—the 'House of St. Mary and St. John' forming the head; the two Hospitals the arms; St. Mary's Orphanage the foot; the Chapel being in the centre.

"I will ask Sister Mabel if I may show you the whole orphanage this afternoon," said Rose, when she had finished her description, "then you'll feel more at home; we can't go to any of the other houses without an invitation, and that's only on great holidays, you know. But hark," exclaimed she, suddenly checking herself, and leaping off the bank, pulling Lydia after her, "that's the dressing bell, we must just go and smooth ourselves for dinner. Come along," and away she scoured, Lydia panting after her.

They "smoothed themselves," as Rose had expressed it, in the lavatory, from which they issued, walking two and two into another room Lydia had not yet seen. This was the Refectory; two long tables ran down the middle, and a third, and shorter one,—at which stood Sister Mabel—crossed them at the top. The children ranged themselves in silence and order at the bottom of the room, and at a given signal quietly took their places. A monitor presided at each of the long tables, the two others dining with Sister Mabel at the third. These two waited on the rest.

Grace was sung, all standing with hands folded, then they seated themselves, and the business of dinner began.

Lydia was very hungry, and the dinner smelt very savoury. She could not refrain from sniffing it once or twice during grace, and at the first mouthful her satisfaction was so great, that she gave it audible vent in the exclamation, "Oh, how nice!" A titter ran round the room, repressed by a 'Hush—sh—sh!' from the monitors; for laughing and talking were not allowed, for order's sake at meals. Lydia, quite unconscious that she was 'out of order,' contentedly finished her plateful, and hungrily looked for more. She had by this time quite forgotten the dry bread and cabbage stalks on which she was to have been fed. A monitor signed to her would she have any more; "O yes, please," she answered aloud, "it is so very nice, and I am so hungry. I only had bread and cheese at home," she added confidentially to Rose, her next neighbour. Again a titter ran through the room, while poor Rose burst into a shout of irrepressible laughter, and then trying to check herself, choked and coughed, became crimson, and then black, and finally retired with a crumb in her throat to the lavatory. "You should remember not to laugh when you are eating," Sister Mabel remarked, when she returned to her place looking rather foolish;

"and little people must remember that talking at meal times is against rules at St. Mary's." But the rebuke was very mildly administered, so mildly, that Lydia did not know, till Rose explained it afterwards, that any rebuke had been intended. But after that day, Lydia made no more confidential observations at meal times.

Grace was again sung after dinner, and then the children, making their curtsies to the Sister, filed off into the playground, which once more rang with shouts and merry laughter.

CHAPTER V.

FOLDING A LAMB—AFTERNOON.

"WELL, you see, I shan't be able to take you over the orphanage this afternoon," said Rose, as she and Lydia stood together after dinner in the schoolroom, "and all because of that stupid crumb that went the wrong way. What a pity!"

"Why, is it sticking there still?" inquired Lydia in great concern.

"No, to be sure not, but don't you see, if I go and ask leave of Sister Mabel now, she'll say I was disorderly at dinner, and—"

"And that it's not very likely you can explain the rules to Lydia, when you don't remember them yourself," laughed Carrie, who had overheard Rose's lamentation.

Rose laughed too, but rather doubtfully. "I think I'll go and ask, though, Carrie,—eh, what do you think?"

"O, yes, best have the worst over at once," said Carrie. Rose nodded, and departed on her errand.

But Carrie's words had recalled the apprehensions Lydia had almost forgotten. "The worst," she thought, "what can that mean? Has Rose broken the rules?" she asked nervously.

"Why, yes; she'd no business to make such a commotion at dinner," replied the monitor; "but what are you looking so frightened about?"

"What will happen to her?" inquired Lydia, scarcely able to speak.

"Happen!" repeated Carrie, staring, "what do you mean? what should happen to her?"

"Will she be buried alive?" was on Lydia's lips, but she did not say this, she only suggested, "Will she be punished?"

"O dear no," said Carrie.

"Then why did you say she'd best have the worst over at once? what 'worst' did you mean?"

"Why, the 'worst' would be that she would have to put off showing you the orphanage till to-morrow; and that would be quite 'worst' enough for Rose, for nothing she likes so well as showing new girls over the house; and if she had to wait till to-morrow, you'd have seen it all, or nearly all, before she'd been able to show it you."

Lydia breathed more freely, and at that moment, Rose returned quite radiant and unconcerned. The crumb, it would seem, had not proved an insuperable obstacle, for she called cheerily to Lydia as she entered, "Now then, let's come at once, so as to have plenty of time before the work bell rings."

"You may go, then?" said Carrie inquiringly. Rose nodded and laughed. "Was anything said about the crumb?" pursued Carrie.

"Well, not exactly," said Rose, and then for half a second she looked grave, as for that space of time she recalled what Sister Mabel really had said, which was, that it was not very kind to laugh at the blunders of a little shy new comer.

"You'll be late for work, I know," Carrie called after them.

"Not if you don't ring the bell half a minute too soon, you cross old thing," retorted Rose, laughing.

"Now, Lydia, we'll begin in order," said she, when they got outside into the passage. "First you see this is the coal-cellar; and this," pointing out another gloomy abyss, "is the dusthole; and here," opening a third dark closet, "we keep our brooms, and brushes, and things."

Now dustbins and coalholes are not the most interesting parts of a house, but it was quite as well that Rose thought them worth displaying, as there is no knowing what dismal apprehensions Lydia might have had respecting what lay behind those "low browed doors." As it was, she peeped in suspiciously, but withdrew her head after a brief inspection, quite satisfied that coals, dust, and instruments of household cleanliness were really the sole contents of these questionable looking places.

"Who uses all those brooms and pails?" she asked, as Rose shut the door of the housemaid's closet, with the air of a person in authority.

"Why, we do, of course," replied Rose, "we children. Don't you know we do all the housework ourselves? Sister Rachel teaches us, and superintends it. Do you know she learnt to scrub on purpose to teach us. Only think, she went and learnt everything, how to clean grates and all; and oh, you never saw such scrubbing; she's very strong, and after she's scrubbed a floor you

could eat off it, it's so beautiful. You will love Sister Rachel, we are all so fond of her. We call her our 'House Sister.'"

"I have not seen her," said Lydia.

"No, because she goes down to St. Joseph's Cottage after all the housework is done here in the morning. She is one of the serving Sisters, and she is so kind to us orphans, because she says she is an orphan herself, and was so unhappy when she was a little girl. Isn't that sad?"

Lydia felt much interested in Sister Rachel.

"You'll see her this evening," continued Rose, "she always superintends our going to bed. And now look here," and opening a door, she drew Lydia into the honeysuckle porch, where Mark had had his interview with Caroline Saunders; "this we call the monitors' garden, because only the monitors may come here without leave, and only the monitors may gather the flowers, which is lucky, as there wouldn't be many left else."

And then Rose, standing in the porch, which was of rustic wood-work, covered with honeysuckles, described some of the external geography of the place. The garden alluded to, consisted merely of a broad gravel walk, bordered on the side next the house by a strip of grass, on the other by a wide flower border, and a wall covered with fruit trees, terminating in a portion of the building running at right angles with it, which Rose informed Lydia was a cloister, or covered way, running all round the Chapel, and communicating with the other parts of the institution. Above the wall, the upper part of the Incurable Hospital was visible, and Rosé pointed out the luxuriant roses and creepers which had been trained to the very topmost story. She further informed her companion that the said hospital had a garden much larger and prettier than theirs; and that each building had not only its garden, but its own distinct front entrance, porch, and waiting room. "There's ours, you know," she said, pointing to the heavy stone porch in the angle where the connecting cloister of the orphanage joined that which encircled the Chapel. Rose spoke and moved so rapidly that Lydia became somewhat confused by her details, and was presently dragged back to the lavatory; "which you've seen, you know, only I must show you how we get from it to the dormitories, for you mustn't suppose we come paddling along this brick passage every night and morning." So Lydia followed her conductress to a door at the opposite end of the lavatory, opening on a wooden staircase, at the top of which was a wide landing, and on to this opened three doors. Rose opened the one facing the stairs. "This is our dormitory," she said in a tone of some exultation and pride.

Lydia did not know till afterwards that Rose was quite A. A.

among the little housemaids of St. Mary's, and that the dormitory was just now her special charge. And certainly the exquisite cleanliness and order of the apartments were a reasonable justification of the little maiden's innocent pride; and sufficiently accounted for her supposition that the contents of a housemaid's closet would be of as much interest to Lydia as to herself. Lydia gazed in utter bewilderment at the long rows of beds, stretching down either side of the room, at the end of which was a large window commanding a beautiful view. Each bed was covered with a blue and white quilt, arranged with such exquisite neatness as might make one suppose that Rose had employed measure and rule for the purpose. Over each bed hung a white wooden cross, and small scripture prints, neatly framed and glazed; the latter, Rose informed her companion, being the private property of the occupant of the bed. Rose had a perfect gallery of pictures over hers, but next to it was a little bed with no adornment at its head but the white wooden cross. "That is your bed," said Rose, "see, next to mine, when you've got some pictures you can hang them up. I can lend you some of mine till you've got some if you like."

Lydia was so astounded by the whole appearance of the dormitory, so utterly unlike anything she had ever seen or imagined, that she omitted to thank her companion for this munificent offer; she only said, "I am glad I am going to sleep next you, for I think I shall be frightened."

"Frightened! nonsense; what is there to be frightened at?"

"I don't know," sighed Lydia, overwhelmed by the number of beds, "but I am glad I shall have some one next to me to speak to."

"Speak to?" repeated Rose in a tone of horror and astonishment; "oh, my goodness me, Lydia, I must explain the rules to you; I forgot you did not know them! and you must remember that the strictest of them all is this; that we may never speak one word to each other after we are in bed at night, and before we get up in the morning. You must be sure to remember that or you'll get into the most horrid disgrace."

Lydia's eyes grew round with fright. "I won't speak indeed," she said breathlessly.

"See," continued Rose, not noticing her friend's consternation, and pointing to two strange enclosures at either end of the dormitory, "do you see those two funny little sort of rooms with windows in them? Sister Mabel sleeps in one, and Sister Rachel in the other, and they can see through those little windows everything that goes on in the dormitory, and if they saw any of us talking—not that *we should keep* quiet, and mind the rules only for fear of being

seen," she added, checking herself, "that would be horridly mean you know; and Sister Mabel trusts us so." And here, to Lydia's surprise, Rose's bright eyes filled with tears, and she turned to the window to conceal her emotion. "But come," she said presently, "I will show you the other rooms;" and she led the way back to the landing, and opening the right-hand door, said, "these are spare rooms for the old orphans, when they come back to stay with us for the 8th of September, which is our great festival; and this," opening the door to the left, "we call our Lady's dormitory, and sometimes the 'blue ribbon room,' but you don't know anything about that yet. It's for old blue ribbons;" was the somewhat enigmatical conclusion.

Lydia looked in and saw a very pretty room, containing six beds, three on each side, divided by blue and white curtains. Each bed, like those in the large dormitory, had its white head cross, and the walls were hung with very pretty Scripture pictures. Texts of Scripture were illuminated round the wall. "How pretty," said Lydia.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Rose, "you'll see it full next 8th of September; and if more than six 'old blue ribbons' come, they'll have to sleep where they can; in the small dormitory, or down at St. Joseph's."

All this was Greek to Lydia, who mechanically followed her companion down another broader staircase made of stone. "I'm going to show you something really pretty now," whispered she, "this is our own little chapel, the dearest little place you ever saw;" and lifting up a heavy red curtain at the bottom of the stairs, she signed to Lydia to pass through. The child did so, and found herself in the St. Mary chapel, the beauty of which she could hardly at that time be said to have appreciated.

It was a complete little chapel in miniature, with its painted windows, altar, harmonium, stalls, and everything complete. "The monitors sit in the stalls," whispered Rose, "and Sister Mabel here at the end. Carrie is the sacristan, and rings the bell. We have prayers here every morning and evening."

The hush and tranquil beauty of this little "holy place," impressed even Lydia; she stood still looking and admiring, but did not speak. Rose pointed to an arched door in the wall, "That's the sacristy, where the altar vestments are kept, Carrie has the charge of that. Carrie is so dear and good, she is just the one to do it," she added earnestly.

At that moment the curtain was lifted, and a monitor entering took her place in one of the stalls. Rose drew Lydia away. "That is Miriam," she explained, when they stood again outside; "she

is preparing for her communion, and she comes here to make her preparation quietly; we may always, if we get leave, come here if we want to read quietly."

Lydia did not reply; she was in an entirely new world, and her little brain was quite bewildered. The stone flight went still lower, and Rose descended till they came once more to the passage they had originally traversed. "We're in splendid time," she said, "the work-bell has not rung yet, and I've shown you everything."

"Here's a room we haven't seen," said Lydia, as they passed one, the door of which was ajar. She was attracted by a picture she caught sight of. It appeared to her to be a drawing of the whole building.

"Oh," said Rose, stopping reluctantly, "I forgot that, it's not worth looking at: it's only the store-room; I hate the place."

"Why?" asked Lydia, peeping through the door.

It was by no means a remarkable looking room. It contained a table, on which were an inkstand and a portfolio, two chairs, and a chest. The walls were concealed by neat wooden cupboards, ranged all round the room.

"Why do you hate it?" asked Lydia again, turning to leave the room.

Rose hesitated, and coloured crimson. Lydia's curiosity was now excited, and she repeated her question more earnestly. "Well because it's our 'prison,'" said Rose at last; "when we're naughty we're sometimes shut in there, and so I hate it. But come, now, there's nothing to see there, and if we run we shall have time to go into the playground before the bell rings."

But Lydia could not stir. "Our prison," these words thrilled her. Here then was the scene, possibly, of those horrible tragedies described by Mrs. Wickens and Mrs. Pips. And that chest, those cupboards, what might they not contain? A dreadful fascination drew her to the threshold of the room, and enchained her there.

"What can you be looking at?" asked Rose in astonishment, "what in the world can you find interesting in that stupid store-room?"

"What is in that chest?" asked Lydia slowly.

"Tea," replied Rose.

"Tea!"

"Yes, tea, where's the wonder?"

"And what's in those cupboards?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. All these cupboards on this side are full of store clothes: those things you have on came out of them; and in these Sister Rachel keeps soap, and candles, and hearthstones *and all sorts of things*—all the stores for us and St. Joseph's too."

This sounded satisfactory enough, but Lydia was not satisfied. How could she be sure those cupboards contained mere stores? and then that chest: Mrs. Wickens had distinctly stated that people in Sisterhoods were buried alive in packing-cases. How could she be sure, therefore, but what some child who had broken rules—perhaps talked in bed—was not already in that chest awaiting her interment. If it only contained tea, and the cupboards only stores, why should Rose say she hated the room, and be so reluctant to enter it?

At that moment the work-bell rang, and Lydia tired and nervous started and almost screamed.

“Why, Lydia, what a goose you are,” exclaimed Rose, “it’s only the bell for work; we must go and wash our hands in the lavatory.”

Lydia choked back the sobs that were rising in her throat, and following Rose, made her preparations with the rest, and finally found herself seated on a form exactly opposite Sister Mabel’s rostrum, with Rose on one side, and a little fair-haired delicate looking child on the other.

The girls all took their places in great order and silence, in a few minutes Sister Mabel entered, the children rose; a hymn was sung and a collect said, and then the business of the afternoon, which was needlework, began in good earnest.

It behoved the children of St. Mary’s to work in good earnest, for the funds of their house came partly from their work. They sat in classes according to the work on which they were engaged. The first class needlewomen were occupied with some very elaborate baby linen, which was an order to be executed with all possible neatness and speed. They of the second class were making clothes for themselves; the third, through which every girl had to pass before she could join either of the former classes, were learning every variety of stitch from simple hemming up to button-holing. These third class girls sat in divisions numbered 1, 2, 3, &c., according to the dignity of what they were learning.

The hemmers were No. 1, and sat at the bottom, the sewers, runners and fellers next, and so on; while at the top of this class were the stitchers and button-holers. Everything was planned with the greatest method; no talking was allowed, as all attention was to be concentrated on the business in hand. The monitors exercised no monitorial duties now, but worked away in the first class with all their might, intent only on their own performances. Two ladies (probationers) superintended the third class; the second class fixed their own work under the auspices of a serving Sister who worked with *them*, and whose special care it appeared was the

superintendence and manufacture of the children's clothes. She was a pale, delicate looking woman, addressed as 'Sister Ruth,' another, Sister Louise, whose dress indicated that she was of the same order as Sister Mabel, worked with and superintended the labours of the first class, her special business being the superintendence of all "orders," executed in the orphanage school. Sister Mabel exercised a general supervision over the whole, and on this particular afternoon was directing the labours of the little band of workers who sat in front of her rostrum, and who had been told off from the other classes to mark Lydia's clothes for her. The marking consisted in sewing on neat little labels bearing the orphanage stamp, and the *letter* by which the new comer was to be known to the laundry maids and wardrobe Sister. The letter to which Lydia had succeeded was M, a happy coincidence, she thought, as it stood for "Mark."

Now Lydia's obvious place was at the very bottom of No. 1 division of the third class; but Sister Mabel pitying the shy nervous child, thought it would give her confidence, to watch the preparation of her own clothes, and had summoned Rose from her place in the second class for the express purpose of encouraging Lydia by the close vicinity of one whom she already knew. A little piece of hemming was given to the child, and then she was left to her own devices; it being part of Sister Mabel's plan, to let new comers find their own level by degrees, and shake gradually into their proper places.

Lydia took her work, and for about ten minutes diligently poked the needle in and pulled it out till about a score of stitches appeared of every conceivable direction and size. Then her fingers ached, and she paused to rest and look about her. She noticed many things this afternoon, which she had been too frightened to observe in the morning: first, that whereas the children generally wore print pinafores and little frilled white collars; the monitors, of whom there were four, had white aprons, small linen collars, and caps tied with blue ribbons. She noticed further that whereas these latter wore medals attached to blue ribbons, there were three other girls, not wearing the monitorial dress, who also wore medals, but the ribbons suspending these were red. She forgot her hemming, and pondered deeply as to what these medals signified, and whether they were mere ornaments, in which case she thought she would ask Rose how she could get one; settling in her own mind that she would wear hers with a red ribbon, red being in her estimation prettier than blue.

Just as she had arrived at this conclusion she perceived that *Sister Mabel's eyes were fixed upon her, and never imagining (how*

should she, poor little girl?) that the Sister was only wondering how soon those pale cheeks would become plump and rosy, and those dark mournful eyes kindle into smiles, she seized her hemming in a spasm of fear, and for another quarter of an hour or so, did not venture to look up. At length Sister Mabel passed right over to the other side of the room, and then Lydia breathed freely again, and once more rested her stiffened fingers.

There was something soothing and pleasant in the quiet of the room, only broken by needful questions and remarks about the work, and it was a pretty, cheerful sight to see all these little work-women so earnest and intent upon their respective labours, occasionally showing them up with a smile of innocent self-satisfaction. When the work was not too absorbing, or Sister Mabel too busy, there was always reading aloud at these needlework hours; but the work on this particular afternoon required too much instruction from the presiding Sisters to make reading feasible, so there was nothing to check the current of Lydia's meditations. She was beginning to think the room was very pretty, and that after all she should not always be afraid of Sister Mabel, and to recall with satisfaction that lady's kindness to her before dinner, when raising her eyes in a fit of abstraction to the open roof above her, she beheld an object which made her heart stand still with fright, and her blood run cold within her.

And what could that be? my young reader may ask. Why fixed on a beam nearly over her head she saw two hooks, large iron hooks; and casting a terrified glance along the rest of the beams perceived two more a little way off. Nor was this all; she now, for the first time caught sight of two upright posts, cut with notches, into which notches were fixed plugs of wood, fastened to the posts by chains, positively by chains! That these hooks and posts and chains were instruments of punishment, Lydia never for one instant doubted. All the dreadful stories she had heard at Lowton crowded at once on her recollection, corroborated as she thought by Rose's horror at the idea of any one daring to talk in bed, and her avowed dislike to that mysterious store-room. She wished she had asked Rose what happened when girls talked in bed; and then her thoughts travelled off to that dormitory with its endless beds, how frightened she should be, she was sure, to go to bed in it. A dreadful feeling of strangeness and home-sickness came over her, a longing for the mattress on the floor, which had been her couch at Lowton. It seemed a year at least since she had parted with Mark; the three weeks that must elapse before she could see him again stretched like an eternity before her; the regular hours of lessons and work from which there was no escape,

the rules which no one dared to break, and the unknown punishments with which she supposed them to be enforced, seemed a bondage too intolerable and horrible to bear; she leant back in her place sick with dismay, and when Rose touched her, whispering "Arn't you well, Lydia?" she bowed her head upon her hands, and burst into an agony of tears.

All the girls looked up, some surprised, some concerned, and some, it is to be feared, contemptuous. Sister Mabel beckoned to Caroline.

"The poor little thing is tired out, and overexcited," she said in a low voice to the young monitor. "Take her away quietly, and lay her on her bed in the dormitory. A good nap will restore her."

Caroline curtseyed, and prepared to obey. But no sooner had she whispered the word "dormitory," to the weeping child, than she exclaimed, clinging to her in terror, "Oh, no, no, no, don't take me there, don't leave me there." Carrie in uncertainty, looked to Sister Mabel for instruction.

"Place her on the couch in my room," said the Sister, "take off her boots, and darken the room."

But Lydia heard this, and to her now excited imagination, it sounded like an order for some horrible form of punishment. She clung closer than ever to Carrie, still exclaiming, "Oh, no, no, no, oh, don't take me there; oh, no, I will not cry, oh, no, no, no!"

The little girl's terror was so evidently real, that the Sisters looked at each other in perplexity. Sister Ruth came to the rescue. "Suppose, my Sister," she said, "Carrie were to take her out into the garden, all the lower end is in shade; perhaps she could sleep out there."

"Do so, Carrie," said Sister Mabel; "I will send out a pillow and covering. Make her a little bed on the grass, and take out your work and sit by her."

Lydia did not mind going into the open air, it almost seemed a step towards deliverance. So Carrie, gathering up her work, led the little girl through the honeysuckle porch to a nice piece of turf, where she herself could rest her back against a tree, and where presently she and Miriam, who was sent out with the pillow and quilt, made a couch for the weary child, and bade her close her eyes and try to sleep.

Meantime Lydia's agitation had somewhat disturbed the young needlewomen, and Sister Mabel's ear caught such expressions as not only "poor little thing," but also "what a goose;" and even, "what a little fool!"

"Hush," said Sister Mabel sternly, for she could be stern sometimes. "I am sorry and ashamed that any girl in this orphanage can be so wanting in feeling as not to sympathise with a mother-

less child in her first loneliness and desolation among a crowd of utter strangers. I trust such unkind expressions as I heard just now, arose from want of thought, rather than want of heart; and that those girls who used them,—I do not ask who they were—will make what reparation they can, by doing their utmost to make this little stranger happy and at home amongst them, and to lighten to her this heavy trial of separation from all whom she knows and loves."

The children sat abashed and silent, and the eyes of several of them overflowed with tears.

In the garden, Carrie sat silent beside her little companion, thinking she would shortly fall asleep; but there was no sleep yet in Lydia's restless eyes. She sat up presently and looked about her. "Well," said Carrie, smiling, and passing her arm caressingly round her, "what are you thinking of, Lydia, dear?"

"What is in that chest in the store-room?" was Lydia's unexpected response, in a tone of such earnestness, that Carrie, astonished, did not instantly reply. "Rose says it's tea," continued the child excitedly, with her eyes fixed searchingly on Carrie's face.

"Then Rose is wrong," replied Carrie, at a loss what to make of her charge, "it used to have tea in it once, but that was at St. Barnabas'; Sister Mabel begged it when it was empty, to hold waste paper and odds-and-ends. Rose must be a goose to suppose we should keep a chest of tea here, only the Sisters drink it, we children have milk."

This was unsatisfactory. The chest then, did not contain tea, and had been empty when brought there. Lydia returned to the subject with such persistency, that Carrie at length thought the child must be light-headed. She debated what she should do. At last she said, "Would you like to look into the chest yourself, and see what we keep in it?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Lydia eagerly; and the wondering Carrie, taking her hand, led her back through the long brick passage to the store-room. "Now see," she said, opening the mysterious chest, "is it not as I told you? Look, here are a lot of old copy-books, put by to light the fires with; we call it the rubbish box—that is, Sister Rachel and I: nobody puts anything in but us; but I thought Rose knew there was no tea in it now."

Lydia looked, and sighed with relief; certainly the box was harmless enough, and in Carrie's charge—that was a consolation. But her eyes wandered round the room; "What are in all those cupboards?" she inquired, in the same eager, troubled tone in which she had asked about the chest.

"Stores, dear," replied Carrie, still wondering. Then a sudden *idea struck her, which made her cheek flush with anger.* She

thought perhaps some mischievous child had been playing a practical joke on Lydia's simplicity. "Why are you so interested in this room, Lydia, it is only the store-room? what do you fancy is in here besides stores?" she asked.

"Why is Rose afraid of this room?" said Lydia, not answering directly.

"Rose afraid! and of this room! I did not know she was afraid of anything," replied Carrie, completely puzzled.

"She said she hated it, and she did not want me to look into it," returned Lydia earnestly.

"And so you immediately fancied it was a Blue Beard cupboard, you foolish little thing," and Carrie laughed so merrily, that Lydia almost felt ashamed.

"But why does Rose hate it?" she persisted. Carrie became grave again. She knelt on the floor, put her arms round the little girl, and kissed her.

"Lydia dear, I'll tell you, just because you have put yourself into such a ridiculous fuss about nothing; but it is Rose's secret, and you must keep it—I mean you must not talk of it to the other girls, because, though every one knows it, it would grieve Rose so." Lydia listened with great interest. "Rose had earned a medal and red ribbon, which is the reward for good conduct; she had tried very hard for it, and every one was pleased when she got it. But one unlucky day she did something very naughty,—never mind what—and not only lost her own medal, but caused another girl to lose hers too."

"Where did she lose it?" asked Lydia eagerly, meaning to go and look for it directly.

"It was taken away from her, I mean, as a punishment; and on that sad day she was sent in here to have her meals by herself; and so no wonder she dislikes the room, because it reminds her of what I know was a sad trouble to her."

"Poor Rose!" said Lydia, sincerely pitying her friend, yet greatly relieved by Carrie's story. "Will she ever have her pretty medal back again?"

"Oh, I hope so some day," said Carrie; "but it takes a long time to win back a medal when it has once been forfeited."

"Is yours a reward for good conduct?" asked Lydia, taking Carrie's in her hand.

"Yes," said Carrie rather shortly, for she did not care to talk of her own merits. "But, Liddy dear, we mustn't stop here talking now, or my baby's frock will never be finished." Carrie had tact enough not to rekindle Lydia's alarms, by saying it was "*against rule*" to be chattering and idling in work time.

Lydia suffered herself to be led back to her couch on the grass, and a great weight being now lifted off her mind, she laid her head on the pillow and fell into a comfortable doze. But in a little while the restless head was lifted once more.

"What, not asleep yet!" exclaimed Carrie; "what's the matter now, Lydia?"

"What are those hooks for in the schoolroom, and the posts and chains?" These questions Lydia propounded in a shy, half deprecating tone, as if she feared the question might be foolish; and in fact Carrie's answer made her feel as if her question had been very foolish indeed.

"The hooks are for the swings we hang up when it is too wet to play in the playground. They are famous swings—such fun—they were a present to us last Christmas. The bars we have had a long time; they fix in the notches in the posts, and then those wooden plugs keep them steady; the children use them for leaping bars, but the real use of them is to pull yourself up by till you can touch them with your chin. I can't do it a bit, but Rose can; she's famous at anything of that kind." Carrie little dreamed what hideous fancies poor Lydia had hung on the swing hooks, and the little maid felt no inclination to tell her. She put her arms round the monitor's neck and kissed her; Carrie warmly returned the embrace, and then Lydia, subsiding finally on to her couch, was soon wrapped in a profound and dreamless sleep.

"The children were right, and she was a goose, and a little fool too," some young reader exclaims; "it is most absurd and unnatural to represent any one, however young, as being terrified by such absurd imaginations!"

Ah, my dear young friend, replies the writer, you are quite mistaken. If you read the Parliamentary debates, you would know, and I can corroborate the same by my *own personal experience*, that Lydia is by no manner of means the only or the oldest person who has mistaken store-rooms or dustbins for dungeons; empty tea-chests or packing-cases for impromptu coffins; gymnastic hooks and bars for instruments of inquisitorial torture: not the only one, by any means, who has imagined that a breach of rule in a religious community might be avenged by a living interment. And Lydia was so far from being a fool, that unlike many persons of far greater advantages in point of age, station, and education, she did not refuse the evidence of her own senses, or the testimony of a trustworthy witness, who living in the midst of all these doubtful objects, might reasonably be supposed to be acquainted with their natures and uses.

Carrie had never read *the Parliamentary debates*, nor *the Record*.

newspaper, any more than I suppose you have done, so as she sat working by the side of the sleeping child, she smiled to herself at the terrors that had been aroused by a few chance words of Rose's. "She must have read or heard the story of Blue Beard," was her very natural conclusion; "I suppose she is very fond of fairy tales, and thinks them true." You see, Carrie knew nothing of Mrs. Pips, and Mrs. Wickens; neither was she aware that there are scores of other old women, male and female, whose delight it is to represent Institutions of which they know nothing as abodes of every species of cruelty and vice, and terrify simple souls with bogies of their own invention. Carrie's cheek had flushed with anger when she fancied some child had been playing on Lydia's credulity; I wonder, what would have been her sensations, had she known that members of Parliament, editors of newspapers and periodicals, and authors of fictions, which they put forth as facts, impose on the credulity of the ignorant and prejudiced, to stir up an unreasoning fanaticism against establishments such as this, which had sheltered her ever since she had been left a helpless seven years' child, abandoned by an unnatural mother to the tender mercies of the parish.

Carrie did not know the Home had enemies. She raised her eyes from time to time as she worked, to the summer sky above her, and saying "Jerusalem the Golden" softly to herself. She took in every detail of that dear Home with quiet gladness. To her it was a *Home* indeed, the centre of all her young affections. Life was very pleasant to her; this world was very fair. 'The lines had fallen to her in pleasant places;' she desired nothing better this side the grave. 'I dwell among my own people,' was the language of her heart: and it was Caroline Saunders' day-dream and highest ambition, to cast in her lot for life in this maligned abode, here to dedicate to her Heavenly King all her young hopes, warm affections, and eager energies, in loving service to His sick, His poor, His little ones.

CHAPTER VI.

FOLDING A LAMB—EVENING.

LYDIA'S slumbers lasted till disturbed by a bell ringing the children of St. Mary's in to supper. Then she woke up refreshed and hopeful, and conducted herself at the tea table with as much propriety as if she had been an inmate of the orphanage for as many weeks as she had been hours.

No crumb went the wrong way in any one's throat; and when the children assembled in the playground after their meal was over, Lydia found herself so greatly invigorated by her comfortable nap, both in body and mind, that she was enabled to enter with great spirit into an animated game of "Prisoners' Bass," besides taking lessons in the art of swinging on the Giant Stride; and at last sank breathless with running and laughing, on to the grass to rest. Here she sat, quite oblivious of her former alarms, and laughing heartily at the merry antics that were going on all around her. So greatly had her courage risen too, since her inspection of the tea-chest, and Carrie's explanations, that she gazed with no other emotion than that of curiosity on several Sisters who had come down this fine evening into the orphanage playground to look on at the children's sports.

The girls treated them with great respect, curtsying when spoken to, and so forth; but it was apparent, even to Lydia, that their presence rather increased the fun than checked it; and when Sister Mabel joined the party, the shout of delight which greeted her, was pretty good evidence of the feelings with which she was regarded by her little flock.

Presently a girl left the players, who had just started a game of "Cat and Mouse," and seating herself by Lydia, showed she wished to make her acquaintance. Lydia, in her present improved state of mind, was quite disposed to respond to all advances, and her new friend's opening address was certainly both conciliatory and flattering.

"You dear girl," she said, in a caressing tone, "I have been wanting to talk to you so long. I feel as if we should be *such* friends." Lydia turned and looked full at the speaker, her eyes expressing the thanks she was too shy to utter. "My name is Isabella; isn't it a pretty name?" continued the girl.

"Very pretty," replied Lydia readily; but she thought within herself that Rose was a pleasanter girl than Isabella; she rather shrank, she knew not why, from the latter's fawning manner.

"Have you any friends?" asked Isabella. Lydia told her about Mark.

"How charming!" was the reply, "and he will come and see you on 'Friends' Days,' of course?"

"Oh, of course," said Lydia earnestly.

"And he will bring you goodies and money?" Isabella asked, more insinuatingly than ever.

"Goodies?" repeated Lydia, not understanding.

"I mean sweet things,—cakes, and such like," explained her new acquaintance.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the child, considering; "I don't think he could afford it," she added simply, "he pays for me here, and that costs a deal of money."

"How nice," said Isabella affectedly. "I was sure you were paid for directly I saw you; I could tell at once you were not a charity girl, like Caroline and Rose."

Lydia looked grave; "I don't know what you mean."

"Why, Caroline, and Rose, and some others, are quite low girls. They have no friends, and they are kept here on charity; but they are favourites with Sister Mabel, and so she puts them before others: it's a great shame. If you get out of favour with them, they'll spite you with Sister Mabel, and if you are not a favourite with her, you'll always be spited and put upon."

"I don't like this girl at all," thought Lydia. "Are not you a favourite?" she said aloud.

"Not I," replied Isabella, "I have no chance; all the favourites are jealous of me. That's another," she whispered, as a tall girl, with a remarkably pleasant face, and wearing a red ribbon and medal, passed them; "she's another charity girl, and she hates me, because I'm so much cleverer than she is. Her name is Charlotte, she's such a sneak. Don't have anything to do with her. Rose is jealous of me, because I'm better looking than she is; and Caroline spites me, because I'm a young lady, and when I first came here I wore the most lovely silk frock, trimmed with lace, and a bonnet with artificial flowers, and I had the most beautiful hair, which was all cut off into this odious crop, of course, and my pretty clothes were sold by those greedy and avaricious Sisters; they make money out of everything they can. Isn't it a shame, their making us work every afternoon at that needlework to keep them in idleness? they sell our work, you know, and keep the money."

Earlier in the day Lydia would have believed all this, but now her instinct warned her against this girl. She meditated how she should escape from her. Isabella crept close, and encircled her waist with her arm. She was a handsome girl, but fallow-faced, with dark hair, and large Oriental looking eyes, which glittered under their drooping lids, in a manner which Lydia thought very unpleasant. She tried to wriggle away from the encircling arm, but was afraid of seeming rude. Isabella watched her attentively, anxious to find out the impression she had made on the new comer.

"If you are a young lady, and if you don't like it, why do you stay?" asked Lydia at last.

"Because just now I cannot help myself," answered Isabella softly. "My mamma is dead; my relations, who are very rich people, and keep their carriage, are at a distance; and besides, they

take no notice of me at present, because they are so angry with my dear papa for putting me to such a low place, instead of to a genteel boarding school, where I should have learnt French and music. My dear papa is an officer in India, he is very rich, and pays a hundred a year for me."

"My brother works for a blacksmith, and pays four shillings a week for me," said Lydia bluntly. She had a motive for making this communication: she thought the wealthy young lady beside her would, perhaps, scorn her acquaintance after this. But Isabella only kissed her, saying, "Happy girl, to have a relation near at hand; think how sad it must be, for me to be separated from my dear papa in India."

Lydia did think it was very sad, and she thought, also, what a pity it was that Isabella could not be instantly transported to him.

"Why did he put you here?" she asked.

"Because he was taken in by Sister Mabel, who wanted the money he pays for me. He thinks I am treated like a young lady, and dressed like one; he little knows how things are really."

"Why don't you write and tell him so, then?" suggested Lydia, making another attempt to escape from Isabella's embrace, "then he'd take you away directly, I dare say."

"Because they prevent my writing to him," was the reply; "and they keep back all his dear letters to me."

"Well, I suppose he'll come back some day," said Lydia, not knowing what other remark to make, and who, being now quite rested, longed to join the 'Cat and Mouse' party, whose bursts of merriment were most tantalizing.

"Yes," replied Isabella, "and I wonder how the Sisters will feel when he comes to fetch me in his beautiful carriage and four, and has them tried before a judge for their cruelty to me."

"O, Lydia," exclaimed Rose, running up at that moment, and throwing herself on the ground while she fanned herself violently with her pocket-handkerchief, "we have had such fun! why didn't you come? You never saw such a 'Cat' as Sister Rachel; look, look, she's 'Mouse' now; but I'm out of breath, I can't run another step."

Lydia remembered what she had heard of Sister Rachel, and watched her with interest; laughing with hearty enjoyment at her adroit manoeuvres in escaping from Charlotte, the "Cat," who pursued her with a steadiness of purpose and breath, that baffled her every effort, so that she fell a prey at last to her remorseless foe, subsiding, like Rose, on to the grass, where she sat, panting, but merry still, and was soon surrounded by a small circle of "Cats" and "Mice," equally exhausted.

"Let's go to her," cried Rose, seizing Lydia's hand, and dragging her up to Sister Rachel's little company. "Sister, this is Lydia Lee, the new orphan."

Sister Rachel was a short, strong, thick-set person, with a pair of merry, brown eyes, and a ruddy, goodhumoured face, her usually high colour rendered more decided now, by the rather severe exercise she had been through. She looked up at Lydia with a smile, kissed her, and seated her by her side, observing, "I'm very glad to see you, dear, but I can't talk to you, for Charlotte has run all the breath out of my body."

The children laughed, and much merry chattering ensued; Lydia sitting by, amused and wondering. She looked round once or twice for Isabella, but that young person had disappeared. She had withdrawn her arm from Lydia's waist directly Rose had made her appearance, and had now slunk off somewhere out of sight. Lydia felt relieved by her absence, and soon forgot, in her amusement at the fun around her, all the unpleasant things she had heard from her new acquaintance.

"Hark!" said Sister Rachel at last, "there's the prayer bell; O dear, how hot some of you children are!"

At the summons of the bell, every game ceased, and the children, falling into orderly ranks, walked two and two back into the house. They had been playing bareheaded in the playground, but to Lydia's astonishment, as they passed through a passage where hung their bonnets and cloaks each girl took down her bonnet and put it on.

"We are going into the chapel," whispered Rose, smiling at Lydia's evident surprise.

Up the stairs, and into the little chapel they filed, quietly and in order. A Sister, whom Lydia had not before seen, played a voluntary on the harmonium as they entered; some versicles and responses were then said; after which, the children chanted the evening Psalms. These were followed by a short passage of Scripture, read by Sister Mabel; the LORD'S Prayer, a collect, and the Grace, completed the little service.

Then Sister Clemence, who presided at the harmonium, played another short voluntary, and all the girls, except a few who, as Rose afterwards explained to Lydia, had been confirmed, and said their evening prayers privately, passed out of the chapel, (at the door of which a monitor collected all the bonnets) and up the stairs to the dormitory. There each child knelt at the foot of her bed, and the senior unconfirmed girl, who happened to be Charlotte, leading, they repeated aloud their private evening prayers. These consisted of a brief confession and prayer, for pardon for all *offences committed* during the past day, and thanksgiving for mercies

received; the LORD's Prayer, a short prayer for relations and friends, which thrilled Lydia's heart, as each child paused to insert mentally the name of her nearest and dearest, and a commendation. Then, rising, they sang a hymn, after which, they quietly and silently made their preparations for the night.

No talking was allowed after prayers, but on this evening Sister Mabel found Rose standing at the dormitory door,—a sign she wanted to speak to her.

"What do you want, my dear?" she asked.

"Sister," whispered the little girl, "if Lydia is frightened and unhappy in the night, and speaks to me, may I answer her?"

Sister Mabel hesitated. Any one in charge, or who ever has had charge, of any kind of boarding school, whether for girls or boys, will understand her reluctance to grant an exemption from the rule of silence from bedtime to rising next morning. "You should have told her the rule," she answered.

"I did, Sister, but I think I frightened her; she looked so scared, and she said she was sure she would be frightened in the dormitory; and I thought that perhaps when everything was quiet, she might feel lonely, and fret." Rose's eyes were full of tears.

"I think when everything is quiet she is much more likely to go to sleep," replied the Sister, smiling, and stroking Rose's glossy hair back from the clear open brow, "I don't like granting exemptions from this rule you know very well." She hesitated; then added, "Could I *trust* you, Rose, really and truly to say only what might be necessary, and not to lie awake chattering unnecessarily, and so setting a bad example in the dormitory?"

Rose for all answer hid her face in the Sister's habit, and burst into tears.

"My dear child," said the Sister kindly, raising and kissing the tearful face, "I did not mean to doubt your truth and honour. You *know* I trust you. But how about your discretion, my little maid? When will my Rose learn to think? Well, I will trust even your discretion to-night; so if poor Lydia frets in the night you may comfort her; but should any child be awake and observe you, you must let it be distinctly known that it is by express permission you are speaking."

Rose thanked her, smiling through her tears, and went off to bed. Sister Mabel stood for a few moments lost in thought, and questioning with herself as to whether she had done right in granting Rose permission, a question she finally decided in her own favour.

But Lydia did not require the privilege that had been conceded. She remembered the rule, and did not feel inclined to speak. Very

[illegible]

soon too, Rose's regular breathing announced that whispers would fail to rouse her. But still as she lay Lydia could not sleep; the events of that long first day at St. Mary's passed and repassed before her like a restless dream. After a while she quietly raised herself in bed and gazed on the strange scene before her as if it were unreal. The moon shone brightly through the white curtained window and dimly revealed the long rows of beds, and their sleeping occupants. Sitting up, resting her chin upon her knees, Lydia wondered which was Isabella's bed, and whether there were any other girls in the orphanage like her. She hoped not. Then she turned and looked at Rose, and rejected indignantly Isabella's insinuation that she was jealous of her. She thought over Isabella's strange story, of her accusations against the Sisters, of her own fears, and Carrie's explanations till she began to wonder whether she had heard all this, or only dreamt it. Such a feeling of unreality came over her at last that she touched Rose's hand to assure herself that she was awake, and at that moment the dormitory door opened noiselessly and the two Sisters entered. Sister Rachel passed into her own little room which was near the entrance, but Sister Mabel, candle in hand, had to traverse the whole length of the dormitory to reach hers. Her quick eye had observed Lydia's movement, and she supposed that she and Rose had been availing themselves of her permission.

Observing however that Lydia, who still preserved her sitting posture with her eyes dreamily fixed on the approaching candle, was the only waking occupant of the dormitory, she set down her light, and putting her arms round the little girl laid her tenderly on her pillow, saying, as she kissed the little pale cheek, "What are these two great eyes staring at, at this time of night? How tired they will be to-morrow."

The child looked up surprised and soothed, the Sister's voice was very soft and gentle. "Shut them up tight," she continued, "and see if sleep won't come. You must be fresh and rested to-morrow so as to be able to begin learning all the things you are going to astonish Mark with on visiting day."

This touched the tenderest chord in Lydia's heart. The Sister's smile filled her with a happy confidence. She put her arms round her neck and kissed her timidly; then laid her head back with a contented smile and sigh; and long before the Sister had gone to her own rest, Lydia's sleep was deep and dreamless.

And so the lamb was folded.

CHAPTER VII.

ROUTINE AT ST. MARY'S.

IT is not my intention to chronicle the doings of the St. Mary's orphans day by day, but perhaps my young readers might like to know how orphanage life presented itself to our little friend Lydia in the daily routine of her new home.

At six the children rose, and each child as soon as dressed put on her bonnet and betook herself to the chapel. Here, when all were assembled, they said their morning prayers, (the senior unconfirmed girl leading,) sang their morning hymn, and then dispersed to their different morning occupations. But before any girl began her work she was required to have committed to memory one verse at least of a chapter or psalm. This was done in chapel whilst waiting for prayers. One verse was the minimum, and enforced by rule, and those who had not had time to learn it before prayers, stayed back and learned it afterwards; but those who had time enough, and ready memories, might learn as much more as they pleased, and many had in this manner mastered the whole psalter, others entire gospels, and epistles. Lydia to her amazement discovered that in addition to the psalter, Rose knew the whole of the Gospel according to St. John, his first epistle, whole chapters and long passages from the book of Isaiah, and was now intent upon the Gospel according to St. Luke. To Lydia was handed a card containing the morning and evening prayers used by the children.

"You will learn these first, my dear," said Sister Ruth, who gave it to her at the chapel door, "before you attempt anything else."

"I shall never be able to learn as you do," said Lydia to Rose, after prayers. She had just discovered her friend's attainments.

Rose, the picture of health and alacrity, was investing herself with a housemaid's apron preparatory to commencing her operations in the dormitory. "O dear yes, you will," she answered, "it will come to you by degrees. I know how you'll begin. First you'll learn the prayers, they'll come easy enough; and then the hymns we are using just now, and then your catechism; and then you'll learn some of the easiest psalms, and then some easy chapters, and then—"

"And then, Miss Chatterbox," said Sister Rachel interrupting, "perhaps you'll be good enough to take your broom and set off for the dormitory."

Rose laughed, flourished her broom round her head, and departed to the scene of her labours. Such of the girls as had no housework to do, assembled round Sister Ruth in that same mysterious store-room, and forms being brought in they seated themselves in front of her as a "mending class." There Lydia began her day's work by running strings into pinafores, and looking on whilst Sister Ruth explained the mysteries of "patching." At five minutes to eight the breakfast-bell rang, after which meal housemaids and menders continued their various labours till the school-bell rang them all into chapel, where morning prayers, (or school prayers as the children called them,) were said at half-past nine. These consisted of a few introductory versicles and responses, followed by the Creed, the LORD'S Prayer, a petition for grace, and the morning psalms, chanted as on the previous evening. As before, too, Sister Clemence presided at the harmonium, and played the children into chapel with a lively voluntary. At the conclusion of the psalms all the backward girls, that is all new comers, whether from St. Joseph's or the world without, left the chapel with Sister Clemence for the schoolroom, where they formed an elementary class under her tuition; but the rest remained in chapel, and received a scripture lesson from Sister Mabel.

This ended, all classes met in the schoolroom, and lessons proceeded till a quarter past twelve, when they were concluded as Lydia had witnessed on the day of her arrival, by a collect, the LORD'S Prayer, and a hymn.

Lydia's place was of course in the lowest class, but she took it with eager pleasure, inspired by Sister Mabel's whisper, "Let us see how many places you will have gained before Mark comes on visiting day."

With this motive before her the little girl worked with an industry she had never displayed before, received a good lesson mark in the conduct book, and with light heart and buoyant spirits felt as disposed as any to rush into the playground after school with a bound and a shriek. But alas! there was to be no bounding and shrieking in the playground that morning. When the door was thrown open after school, a universal groan proclaimed the dismal tidings that it rained!

"Never mind," said Rose recovering her spirits, "we'll have some fun in doors, that's all. Carrie, Carrie, open your cupboard. Swings and bars! Swings and bars!"

And now Lydia found herself brought face to face with the practical intention of those hooks and chains.

Out of a closet opened by Carrie were dragged two swings, and a long bar. The latter was fixed in the upright posts by means

of the plugs attached to those dreadful chains; the swings were quickly reared to their hooks by a long pole, with a prong at the top, and then such fun began that Lydia, perched on a table, on which she had scrambled to avoid being overthrown in the *melée*, laughed till she was nearly as hot and breathless as the players. The game, which at first seemed rather hazardous, was something on this wise. Four girls mounted the swings, two in each, one sitting, one standing, and worked the swings as high as they could possibly go. Two others whirled a long skipping-rope, at the lower end of the schoolroom, (at the opposite end was the bar.) Then two others running into the skipping-rope, performed wonderful antics therein, and finally dashed out, running under the swings in full play, and leapt the bar at the other end of the room. They followed each other so quickly in couples that the whole room seemed astir with girls, the most remarkable part of the game being that nobody got hurt! But to Lydia's mind the most notable feat was performed by Rose, and another girl named Harriet, who, when tired of "swing dodging" swarmed up the upright poles like bears, and from the top looked calmly down on all beholders.

Out of the hurly-burly Sister Mabel retired into her own sitting-room, the door of which opened into the schoolroom, and the window into the playground. The former she left open in case any interference on her part might be necessary. But the monitors kept excellent order, and nothing but frolicsome good humour prevailed.

"Do you like it?" asked Rose, as she walked by Lydia's side into the lavatory to "smooth herself" for dinner.

"Oh, so much!" replied Lydia heartily. "I do so wish Mark was here."

That afternoon saw the little girl without a fear or misgiving, in her proper place at the bottom of the hemmers; no longer tormenting herself with imaginary horrors, but summing up all the wonderful things she should have to recount to Mark, and wondering to what pitch of excellence in reading, writing, and needlework she might attain before visiting day arrived.

She had forgotten all about Isabella, till she was recalled to her recollection by Sister Ruth's observation, "I think your work gets worse every day, Isabella." Then Lydia looked up, and saw her companion of the preceding evening smiling affectedly with her head on one side, as if she had received a compliment.

"No work no play, Isabella," said Sister Mabel sternly, "you know the rule."

But it seemed that Isabella cared but little for it. Her work

was pronounced so bad, when the rest were released, that when after tea her companions gathered for recreation in the now sun-bright playground, she was to be seen work and scissors in hand, taking out the results of her afternoon's misconduct.

"Isn't it a shame?" she whispered to Lydia, as she passed her.

"Isn't what a shame?" asked Lydia.

"Why that I should have to work when all the others play."

"No," replied Lydia bravely, "Sister Mabel told you how it would be, but you didn't choose to mind."

"Dear me, how conceited we are," sneered Isabella, "you're going to be one of the favourites I suppose."

Lydia coloured with anger.

"To be sure she is," replied Carrie, "there's no fixed number for Sister Mabel's favourites; any one who works with a will can be one. You know that, well enough, Isabella."

Isabella sneered again, and was preparing to make some still more offensive observation, when Carrie seizing hold of Lydia's hand, ran with her out into the playground.

"If Isabella is a young lady, and her papa is so rich, why doesn't he take her away?" asked Lydia.

"What can you mean?" replied Carrie.

"She told me her papa was an officer in India, and very rich," and she repeated to Carrie the substance of Isabella's romance.

"Did Isabella really tell you all those falsehoods?" asked Carrie amazed.

"Yes, isn't it true?"

"Oh, Lydia, what a heart she must have. She has neither father nor mother. She was found by one of the Sisters who visit among the poor, living with a dreadful old woman who used to send her out begging and beat her. She was quite a little thing, only six years old, when Sister Katherine brought her here. She was put in here at once, because it was thought best not to send her to St. Joseph's; and I remember what a state she was in. Oh, so dirty and ragged, and covered with sores. They were obliged to put her for a little while into the infirmary."

"Oh, Carrie!"

"And you can't think what a friend Sister Mabel has been to her. Twice Mr. Neville and the Mother have declared she should be sent away, and each time Sister Mabel has begged her off, and made excuses for her, and spoken to her so seriously and kindly."

Lydia's loving heart beat high with indignation. "I hate her," she declared, "I won't speak to her any more."

"Oh, don't say so," said Carrie earnestly, "perhaps she may be *sorry some day*, who knows? But isn't it sad? Only think of

her saying such things, and the Sisters keeping her, and clothing her, and teaching her, and caring for her. Oh!" she added, her eyes filling with tears, "I feel as if I could never, never do enough to repay one quarter of all they have done for me."

"Nobody pays for you then?" asked Lydia timidly.

"No, nor for Rose either, or for Charlotte. And there are several more," (she mentioned their names) "here and at St. Joseph's too, whom the Sisters keep entirely for nothing. Rose has been here ever since she was two years old; only think! I was seven when I came; and I think Charlotte was five."

At this juncture a chorus of voices called upon Carrie and Lydia to join in a game of "Tom Tiddler." Lydia immediately obeyed the summons, but Carrie shook her head, and walked slowly and thoughtfully back towards the house. At the door she stood for some minutes considering, and then sought for Isabella, whom she found still engaged over her neglected needlework.

"Isabella," she said very gravely, "how came you to tell such wicked stories to Lydia."

"Oh, she's told, has she?" said Isabella quietly.

"Not exactly; she could not understand why you should remain here if you dislike the place so much," said Carrie.

Isabella laughed a low unpleasant laugh to herself. "I told her my dear papa in India was not aware I did not like the place."

"Are you beside yourself, Isabella?" exclaimed Caroline.

"Must I needs be beside myself to have a little joke with a girl who is little better than an idiot? My eyes!" ejaculated this amiable young person, "how she did take it all in to be sure!"

Caroline turned away in utter disgust. "You might at least have spared Sister Mabel," she said, her voice trembling with anger. "Have you no heart, Isabella? is it possible that you have no feeling for all the Sisters have done for you? and Sister Mabel in particular? Where would you have been now if it had not been for her sweet patience and kindness?"

"In the workhouse, I suppose," answered Isabella composedly, "I should not certainly have liked that much, the dress is so frightfully unbecoming."

Caroline stared at her as at a being of another race. "Do you love no one," she said after a pause, "no one at all, Isabella?"

"Myself exceedingly," replied the girl, "I don't feel inclined to break my heart about any one else, I assure you."

Caroline sighed and left the room. Words, she felt were quite thrown away; she might as well try to evoke human feeling from one of the school forms.

Sister Mabel's *sitting-room* opened, as has been before observed,

out of the schoolroom, and towards it Isabella made her way soon after Carrie's departure. "Come in," was the response to her humble and scarce audible knock, and in she went, work in hand, the very picture of penitent humility.

"What a pity, Isabella, that this was not done before," said the Sister, examining the work, which the girl with a low curtsy and imploring gesture placed in her hand. "How sad it is, that day after day there is the same grievous tale of wilful idleness and indifference. Still I am glad, very glad, to see that you have not sulked over this, but have done it quickly and well. I trust I may take this as a proof that you are sorry, really sorry, eh, my child?"

Isabella's head had dropped lower and lower, and at the last words she covered her face with her pinafore, and her shoulders heaved with sobs. Having no idea, and never guessing that no tears followed upon Isabella's emotion, the good Sister felt quite relieved to find that this "ne'er-do-weel," really did seem to care after all. She stroked her head kindly, as she added more words of encouragement and counsel, ending with, "And now, my dear, as you have done your best to redeem your fault by working cheerfully and well, you may put your work away, and join your companions in the playground."

Isabella curtsied two or three times, still keeping her pinafore over her face, which perhaps was prudent, as by that means, Sister Mabel was prevented seeing the strange smile upon it. "I don't want to play, Sister," sobbed she, "I don't deserve to play. I know I have been very idle and wicked, and the others will despise me for it; I would rather take a book."

"And I would rather you *did* play," answered the Sister gravely. "And as to your companions despising you, they are not likely to do that, if they see you are heartily and honestly sorry for having done amiss."

"But, if you would let me, I would rather take a book, really, dear Sister; I do really want to do better; I want to improve my mind."

Now Sister Mabel was by no means a perfect head of an orphanage, she was no match whatever for the girl before her, and so that girl knew. Guileless herself, Sister Mabel was slow to suspect guile in others, but these last words of Isabella's grated on her ear, and made her uncomfortable and suspicious. She was silent for a moment, gazing out on to the playground, and during that moment Isabella reconnoitred her from behind the pinafore, but no morsel of her face was to be seen when Sister Mabel turned to look at her, saying, slowly and almost sternly, "The Bible says, '*there is a time for all things* ; a time to work, and a time to play : ' this

is, most certainly, the time to play; as to 'improving your mind,'—she spoke with a slightly sarcastic emphasis—"I shall hope to see that desire carried into effect to-morrow morning in school; just now, I would rather you should 'improve' your body."

Isabella, with face still concealed, curtseyed, and withdrew, closing the door carefully behind her. She looked round to see that no one was by, and, finding the coast quite clear, made one or two pirouettes on her toes, and holding out her frock, swept a magnificent curtsey to the sitting-room door, put her thumb to her nose, and walked out into the playground.

Here she was presently joined by one or two girls low down in the school, and whose names had some ugly looking entries against them in the "Mark Book."

"May you play? has she forgiven you?"

"Forgiven me!" repeated Isabella, in a tone of intense scorn, "trust me to measure the length of Sister Mabel's foot,—old cat! How I hate her! Hush, don't look, she's at the window watching us. Beastly old spy!"

The two girls to whom she spoke were both dependents on the Sisters' bounty. They laughed. But one of them afterwards observed, "I wish you wouldn't say those things, Isabella, Sister Mabel will hear of them one day."

"You'll tell, perhaps, Jemmy," sneered Isabella, "but remember, in that case, I should have one or two little things to tell of you."

Jemima coloured furiously. "I never tell," she exclaimed, "I never thought of telling. You know how fond I am of you, Isabella; and when my grandfather comes on 'Friends' day, you know you're to have half my goodies."

"Let's come under the tree," said the other, coaxingly, for she knew that she was as much in Isabella's power as Jemima, "and you shall tell us stories of all the nice people you knew before you came here."

"Carrie," said Sister Mabel, beckoning the monitor towards her, "I sent Isabella out to play. You know I don't like those private 'commudgings'; and Isabella's conversation is anything but improving. Break up that little set quietly, and get them to play. If you have any difficulty, say I wish it."

Carrie curtseyed, and darted off. Speaking to Rose a few words, the two girls bore down on Isabella's little company. There was some talking, and a little apparent hesitation, but presently the whole party, including Isabella, were absorbed into a general game.

The merriment seemed very great, and it was pleasant to hear the children's ringing laughter; but there are black sheep in every

flock,—some blight in every garden; and enough has been said to show that Sister Mabel's was not altogether a bed of roses.

Carrie had listened in silence to the Sister's remark that Isabella's conversation was not improving. Neither then nor afterwards did she say one word of what had passed between Isabella, Lydia, and herself.

Was she right? Quite right, I think.

Mr. Neville had once defined the duties of a monitor to her, and she had not forgotten his words. "It is not a monitor's business," he had said, "to listen, and spy, and report. If once your companions look upon you as a spy, your influence is gone for ever. Of course, if a matter is serious, and affects others, then, for the sake of those others, you must report a wrong-doer; or if, by reporting, you can do the wrong-doer any good, then you are bound to report the wrong done: otherwise, your special business is to set a careful and blameless example yourself, and if you hear or see anything wrong, to protest against it yourself, and lead your companions to protest also. Speak kindly, moreover, to your erring companion; reason with her, and try to lead her to own the fault herself. But above all things, remember, that you elder girls have far more power to check and restrain evil, whether of word or deed, than any Sister. You must needs know more than they can ever know of what goes on amongst you, for evil always hides from the light; well, let all your influence go to put down and *shame* down the evil, and to lead your companions to do so too."

Carrie had always tried to follow these directions. It was in obedience to them that she had spoken to Isabella that evening; in obedience to them that she had said nothing to Sister Mabel; in obedience to them, moreover, she made her reports occasionally; weighing, with a wisdom rare in one so young, which cases should be reported privately, which publicly, and which had best only be mentioned between girl and girl.

CHAPTER VIII.

LYDIA'S COMPANIONS.

CARRIE Saunders was not the only monitor at St. Mary's. Her duties were shared by three others,—Martha Burt, Mary Anne Foster, and Miriam Grey. The former, however, being lame and very delicate, Charlotte Armstrong, the senior "Red Ribbon," acted for her, transacting many of her monitorial duties, such as waiting at table, assisting in school, &c.

As some of my readers might like to know a little of the history of Lydia's companions, I will briefly describe the circumstances of those girls with whom she was thrown most in contact, beginning, of course, with Carrie Saunders, the senior monitor. Such as feel no curiosity on the subject can skip this chapter.

Caroline Saunders had been discovered by one of the District Visiting Sisters, a little neglected seven years' child, cowering by the bedside of a dying grandmother. Her mother had deserted both her husband and child about two years before. The husband, a journeyman carpenter, always rather delicate, had never looked up after his wife's desertion, and died within a few months, of rapid consumption. The child's maternal grandmother then took the little orphan to her home, where she struggled hard to maintain both herself and it. But age and infirmity pressed hard upon her. Too proud to ask for aid, none knew how often the old woman and her grandchild wanted the commonest necessities of life, and when at last the Visiting Sister found her way to them, she was but just in time to close the dying woman's eyes, and assure her that the desolate little one should be cared for. Of the heartless woman who had forsaken husband, child, and mother, no one knew anything beyond a vague rumour that she had gone to India, and year by year rolled on and little Carrie Saunders remained unclaimed at the St. Mary's Orphanage, growing into a happy, healthy child, her young heart clinging to her protectors with a love that seldom expressed itself in words, but which manifested itself in every action of her daily life.

Thoughtful beyond her years, Carrie had been sensible when first brought to the orphanage from what misery she had been rescued, and as her spirits rose in the pleasant home into which she had entered, her gratitude towards those who had rescued her assumed the form of a daughter's deepest love.

It is easy to mould a loving nature if love undertake the task. Under Sister Mabel's gentle discipline Carrie's sensitive disposition, instead of becoming morbid, perhaps, or scrupulous, was gradually trained to perfect truth, then to a high and generous honour, and finally became a character of such true and simple piety, that the Sister may be pardoned if her thoughts dwelt sometimes in happy yet humble exultation on the promise of the fair young plant she was rearing for the garden of the LORD.

And Carrie was no less a favourite with her companions. They trusted her, and trust is the foundation of love. Moreover, "she never stuck herself up to be better than others," as some of them had observed; she gave herself no airs, assumed no superiority, even when by virtue of the blue ribbon she became monitor, among the

rest. To help others, seemed the object of her school life, and there was not a girl in the school, even among the "ne'er-do-weels," who did not feel sure of Carrie's assistance in any and every emergency whenever assistance was wanted.

Somewhat similar in character was Martha Burt, a gentle but much afflicted child. She had no near relations that any one knew of. A lady had found the lame suffering girl in a neighbouring workhouse, and touched by the mournful expression of the little pain-worn face, she had transplanted her to the more genial atmosphere of St. Mary's Home. Here Martha, who at first appeared a dull heavy child, seemed by degrees to find fresh faculties. Love kindled love, as it always will in hearts not wholly depraved; a strong desire to show gratitude to her patroness gave interest and zest to her daily tasks, and soon the lame girl had taken and maintained an excellent place in the school, and, at the time of Lydia's introduction to St. Mary's, Martha Burt was not only one of its monitors, but also acknowledged as the best needlewoman among all its young inmates.

Too lame to join in any sports, and not strong enough to care much for the noisy mirth of her companions, Martha's influence was but indirect; but it was an influence that was felt. The silent girl, bending so patiently over some delicate little piece of needlework whilst all the rest were at high games in the playground, taught a lesson to the others of that unselfish love which makes its happiness consist in giving pleasure to others. That playhour work was always something she was making as a pleasant surprise for her patroness, to be ready by the next time she came to see her, or it was something for one of the Sisters, or of her companions, and very often it turned out to be Sister Ruth's, or Sister Louisa's work which was behindhand, and which she had begged earnestly of them to finish as "recreation work." And they would let her have it, for it was delightful to see how the pale cheek would flush, and the meek eyes sparkle with pleasure at the idea that her "play work" would really help those whom she loved undemonstratively, but yet with all her heart.

A great contrast to Martha Burt was Mary Anne Foster, a stout good-humoured girl, thoroughly truthful, thoroughly honest, and giving free expression to all her likes and dislikes, in firm faith that truth and honesty required that there should be no reservation on those matters. The girls winced a little under her home-thrusts, but they liked her nevertheless—at least, all whose liking was worth having. Amongst girls of mean ways and low motives, she was like a rough but healthy sea breeze, dispersing meanness and *wrong-doings* as blight and malaria; and wherever Mary Anne's

loud voice was heard, there you might be sure mischief was routed, and honour and kindness held their own. Mary Anne Foster was motherless, but she had a father, a seafaring man, who came now and then, at rare intervals, to see how his only daughter was getting on, and expressed his satisfaction by all sorts of strange little gifts to the Sisters. She had, moreover, two brothers, a good deal older than herself, who also paid occasional visits to the orphanage, and were as heartily loved by the warm-hearted girl, as she was fondly admired by them. The father and brothers had, ever since the mother's death, clubbed together to place the motherless child in the safe shelter of St. Mary's.

The fourth monitor was Miriam Grey, and whereas Mary Anne Foster had a father and two brothers, Miriam Grey had a mother and two sisters. The eldest sister worked with and for her widowed mother, and they paid for Miriam's education at St. Mary's; for Miriam's father had been a schoolmaster, and she being more like him than his other daughters, and a bright, clever girl as well, it was her mother's great desire that this daughter should be trained as a schoolmistress. The youngest was about seven years old, and lived with her mother. Miriam was tall and slender, a very handsome girl, with sparkling dark eyes, a small aquiline nose, well formed mouth, and very dark hair. Her movements were quick and decided, and her companions complained sometimes that she was "cross;" but her "crossness" was very transitory, she was aware, too, of her fault and struggled honestly against it. She was a brave generous girl, moreover, very ready to own herself in the wrong when faulty, and to make amends by every means in her power. Miriam Grey was the cleverest girl at St. Mary's, head of her class long ago, and at this time pupil teacher. She hated everything vulgar and mean, was in the highest degree truthful and trusty, was intolerant of affectation and pretension, and though impatient of stupid idleness, was tenderness itself to stupidity that was doing its best; and took everything weak and suffering under her special protection.

Miriam Grey was fond of a good game of play, and played very well, but she was also very fond of day-dreaming, a dangerous propensity in which my young readers would do well not to indulge. "A penny for your thoughts, Miriam," Mr. Neville had said to her one day, when he had found her sitting under a tree in the monitors' garden with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, lost in meditation. But she had only looked up blushing, laughed and ran away.

She told these day-dreams once, however, to Sister Mabel. The Sister was *not well*; lying on her couch in her private room.

Miriam had been administering some tea to her, and then knelt by her side by the open window, gazing dreamily on the sunset sky. Her day-dreams came out gradually. She had settled in her own mind that she would be a first-class schoolmistress in a country school. The school was to be very large, the country very beautiful. Attached to the school was to be the loveliest cottage for the mistress that ever was seen. Here her mother and little sister would live, with Miriam to take care of them. Her eldest sister would marry a rich farmer and live close by. She described the country, built the house, detailed its internal arrangements, planted the garden, and covered the house with creepers to the very roof. She was going to do wonders in the school, moreover. The children were to be better taught and better managed than children ever were before, and she would work in the parish under the direction of the rector, and be his right hand in all sorts of matters parochial. I am not sure whether she did not also intend to play the church organ and train the choir.

She poured out all these imaginations to the Sister, who listened smiling silently, now and then stroking the girl's soft hair. Miriam's face was glowing with enthusiasm, and her dark eyes shone with such a light of intelligence and brilliant hope, that Sister Mabel had not the heart to check her as she detailed the dreams of her girlish ambition. There was something so noble, too, in these that the Sister would not for worlds have damped the bright young spirit with cold words of criticism and warning. She listened to all, entered into all, and then when the ardent child, grateful for her sympathy, nestled her head against her with all a daughter's loving confidence, she gently suggested the not dwelling too much on such bright dreams, not carving out lines of life for oneself so distinctly, the wisdom and happiness of waiting for the guiding will of God, the danger of day-dreams leading to unreality, and the wisdom of living more in the present, that is, in fitting oneself for the desired future by strictest attention to every duty that every hour brings, leaving that future to be clearly defined by the Will that ruleth all things.

After that Miriam worked harder, and dreamed less, and her love and confidence in her Sister Superior waxed stronger than ever, from the feeling that she, and she only, knew and sympathised in her bright young aspirations.

And now having sketched the four monitors we must say a word about Charlotte Armstrong, the senior "red ribbon," who performed so many of Martha Burt's monitorial functions. She was a tall sprightly girl, with a pleasant open face, and clear hazel eyes. *A fair scholar, a good needlewoman, ready at play, ready at work,*

warm-hearted and impulsive, a trifle dictatorial, perhaps, in manner, rather apt to lose her temper in a dispute when conscious she was right, abhorring falsehood and wrong, but rather too eager in defending the right, somewhat proud too of her own rectitude, of the good marks against her name in the conduct book, her red ribbon, and semi-monitorial position. She was a great favourite with the girls, much more so than Miriam, whom she in some respects resembled; but then Miriam was more reserved, and did not throw herself so readily into other persons' places and schemes. Charlotte Armstrong was, like her, a widow's child; she had several brothers and sisters, and it was a glad day for the whole family when Mr. Neville procured Charlotte's admission into the orphanage. Nothing was paid for her. Her mother belonged to the St. John's Common district, and had merited some help in bringing up her large family by her own untiring industry.

And Rose Berger, Lydia's special friend, perhaps some would like to hear a word about her? Father she had never known, and of her mother scarce any remembrance remained. This poor woman had come as a patient to the Convalescent Hospital. She was a dressmaker out of employment through ill-health, and some charitable lady had sent her to St. Luke's in hopes that change of air would restore her. But her time of residence passed, and she was no better; it was renewed, but still she drooped. It was soon evident that her days were numbered. She was removed to the hospital for incurables, and her lady friend communicated with. The latter was "very sorry for the poor woman Berger, but she could do no more, she did not feel justified in undertaking any expense on her behalf." Her letter was quite kind, quite reasonable, but the sick woman covered her head when she heard it, and groaned aloud. Then the Sisters inquired about her relations. She did not appear to have any, or friends either. She said very little, but there was a look of despair in her eyes which was very sad to see.

"This poor thing has something preying on her mind," said Doctor Ashworth, "can't you ladies find out what it is and ease her, poor soul? My word for it, she's fretting the rest of her life away in dread of the workhouse."

"We can soon settle that," replied the Mother Superior. "God forbid we should turn her out to die." And tenderly, very tenderly she broke to the dying woman that there was no fear that they would send her from them. There was her home as long as she liked to stay, if health returned in any measure to her; till death, if her illness should prove mortal. The burst of joyful weeping, almost hysterical in its violence, which greeted these kind tidings,

almost unnerved the Superior. She let the weeping have its way at first, but then firmly and gently checked it. As she stooped over the bed to wipe the pallid face, the sick woman suddenly threw her arms around her, straining her to her bosom in a convulsive embrace, and incoherently invoking blessings on her, then she suffered the Mother to lay her on her pillow, and was soon sleeping the first untroubled sleep that had been hers since her arrival.

"Will she recover?" the Superior asked of Dr. Ashworth as he nodded his approval of the effect of her communication.

"Hardly," said he, "the disease is far advanced, but I believe she will rally, perhaps for a year or so."

She did rally for a time, but a cloud seemed once again to overshadow her. She would moan and toss restlessly on her pillow; seemed abstracted and wandering when the chaplain visited her, but not a word did she say to any one of what distressed her.

Accident, however, revealed it. A letter came one day which threw her into such violent agitation that all former bad symptoms returned. In her despair she let the Superior see the letter, and then it appeared that she had a little daughter not three years old, that when she had come to St. Luke's, she had placed it out to nurse, agreeing to pay the woman who took charge of it, five shillings a week. But her money was long since exhausted, the woman would wait no longer for payment. She would keep the child no longer. The letter was fierce and threatening, and the unhappy mother's heart was full of sickening dread lest the angry writer should vent her wrath upon the unoffending baby.

"Now listen to me quietly, Rose Berger," said the Superior, "commend your child to God, and leave this matter in our hands. I pledge you my word no harm shall happen to your child if I can help it. Why did not you trust me sooner, my poor girl?"

The woman clung to her, covering her hands and dress with kisses. The Superior left her to consult with the Chaplain on this new difficulty, which it would appear was not insurmountable, for in less than three days' time, the baby arrived at St. Mary's, a little fat, rosy, toddling child, with dark auburn hair, and clear dark eyes, who being taken to her mother's bedside, shouted and crowed with delight, stretching her little plump arms in eager longing towards the dying woman.

Long, very long, was her embrace of that child, so soon to be utterly orphaned, and then, when the little one was coaxed away, she turned with love unutterable imprinted on her countenance to the friend so unexpectedly raised up to her, and folding her arms closely round her, laid her head upon her bosom, and poured out, as to a mother indeed, all her past history.

It need not here be told. It was a tale of grievous sorrow, and she who listened to it clasped the poor sufferer closer to her, and her warm tears fell upon her drooping head.

Then came an evening of perfect peace. The earthly anxieties which had so preoccupied the broken heart were all gone now. She hailed the chaplain's visits as blessings indeed. Gently, very gently, and very gradually her life ebbed away. She lingered a few weeks longer, and then her spirit passed away in such deep love and penitence, such humble child-like hope, that they who laid her to rest in her quiet grave, felt they had good cause for the belief so strong within them that the blighted Rose there hidden away, would spring forth one day a glorious Rose, meet for the Master's garden.

Rose Berger's little daughter had been baptized by the names "Rose Madeleine," on the very day that she herself received for the first time from the hands of Mr. Neville that divine Sacrament which was to be the support of her penitent spirit during her passage through the valley of the shadow of death. The little maiden was first placed in the cottage of St. Joseph, where she remained till she had attained her seventh year, and was then transferred to the care of Sister Mabel, in St. Mary's Home.

High-spirited, full of fun and frolic, generous and impulsive, "Rose," as she was always called, was a general favourite with all her companions, while her truthful and affectionate disposition endeared her to her teachers. She was sadly thoughtless, however, and continually falling, in consequence, into petty scrapes, out of which she came tearful and penitent, and so eager to repair her transgressions that it was difficult (at least so Sister Mabel thought) to find much fault. Nevertheless it must be confessed that Rose was a troublesome charge, sometimes winning golden opinions, carrying off prizes and praises, and then by some naughtiness arising out of her excessive heedlessness losing them all more rapidly than she had gained them. But there was one feature in Rose's character which especially endeared her to Sister Mabel, and that was the brave humility with which she would rise from her fall, and without wasting any time in mere repinings, set herself humbly and lovingly to retrace her steps to the path of duty from which she had strayed. This had been particularly observable when she lost that "red ribbon," to which allusion has already been made. Very great had been her rejoicing, very happy had Sister Mabel been, when the mark book gave such strong testimony in Rose's favour, that this much coveted badge of good conduct had been awarded and bestowed upon her, by Mr. Neville, one happy 8th of September, in presence of all her companions. Two

girls had shared the honour with her, Charlotte Armstrong, and the little pale child that had sat by Lydia's side in the work class on her first memorable afternoon at St. Mary's. This girl, Susanna Brest, was motherless; her father a soldier on foreign service had, previous to his going abroad with his regiment, brought her to the orphanage, and implored the Sisters, with tears in his eyes, to take his little one under their care, out of the way of her sisters, two bold, worthless girls, who had ever since their mother's death shamefully neglected poor little Susanna.

Susanna, or Sanna as she was generally called, was a remarkably gentle conscientious child, fondly attached to her father, and devoted to Sister Mabel. Of all her companions Rose was her favourite, and it would be difficult to say which of the two children rejoiced most in the other's good fortune on this occasion.

Now Rose's ribbon, and alas, Sanna's also, were lost on the same day and in this wise. The bottom of the playground terminated in a very high bank, and a strong paling, on the other side of which the ground sloped away to a meadow, separated from the common by a ditch and hedge. A stringent rule forbade the children ever attempting to pass the paling, or indeed to leave the playground without especial leave. One day Rose found her friend Sanna crying bitterly on the top of the bank. Isabella had thrown a ball, a very favourite ball of hers, over the paling. Rose's warm spirit was aroused and high words passed between her and Isabella. But high words would not bring back the ball. "I can see it," exclaimed Sanna, excitedly, "look, Rose, through this hole in the paling; oh, I could get it in a moment if I might only get over. But the school-bell will ring directly, and if we wait till after work the ball will be gone, it is so near the foot-path that some one will be sure to pick it up," and her tears burst forth afresh.

A shout of derisive laughter from Isabella, and one or two of her set, so exasperated Rose that she turned upon her more angrily than ever, and at length losing all self-command, as Isabella continued to taunt, gave her a sounding slap in the face.

Isabella shrieked and lamented at the very top of her voice, while Rose with flushed face and angry sparkling eyes ran off to ask leave to fetch Sanna's ball out of the meadow.

But Rose's excited story and appearance, and Isabella's dismal wailing, caused inquiries to be made, resulting in a stern rebuke to Rose, and a positive refusal from Sister Mabel to allow her, after such a display of violence, to make any efforts for the recovery of the ball. Now Sister Mabel did not understand the ball was of any particular moment to Sanna; Rose was too angry to explain anything clearly, so the impression left on the Sister's mind by

inflicting evidence produced on the occasion was that the ball simply one of many with which the children amused themselves and Isabella and her friends stoutly maintained that it had been brown over by accident. Alas! for the mischief of uncontempered. Doubly indignant at what she conceived an act of justice to Sanna, Rose rejoined her friend, her wrath for the transfer from Isabella to Sister Mabel. Nor was it at all lessened by Sanna's piteous lamentations over her ball. "My father gave it me," she cried, "I wouldn't lose it for anything else in the world."

"You shall have it," exclaimed Rose vehemently. "How?" asked Sanna anxiously, but at that moment the working, and all the children hastened to obey its summons. The evening after tea, Rose and Sanna stood on the top of the hill where the other children were all busily engaged in a general game, and had no eyes just then for them. Rose was explaining to Sanna that she would take all risk upon herself, would scale the wall and bring back the ball; and Sanna pale and breathless at Rose's audacity, was so overcome by her exceeding desire to recover herself of her lost treasure, which still lay within sight, that she offered but feeble remonstrances. "A little adroit scrambling and Rose was on the other side. "It is," she whispered, putting the ball through the hole; "to get back again."

"Indeed, but how?" Rose tried and tried in vain. "You could scramble up your side," said she to Sanna, as she used for breath after frantic leaps and struggles, "and give me a hand, I am sure I could do it." Sanna with considerable difficulty, accomplished this feat, and handed her hand to Rose. Another scramble, "Now then, pull, pull." Sanna pulled with all her might, lost her balance and fell over the other side.

"How frightened they were, and not a little hurt. Rose's dress was torn, and her hands were bleeding, and poor little Sanna badly bruised. The children sat at the foot of the paling giggling bitterly. Not for their hurts, but for the consequences of their fault. At first for the consequences only, but after awhile for the fault itself.

"Don't cry, Sanna, darling," said Rose, soothingly, "it was all my fault. If I had only kept my temper Sister Mabel wouldn't have been my getting the ball. And it was only I who thought of being so naughty, and disobedient, and defiant. Oh, how could I?" and Rose choked with sobs. "O, no, it was my fault, only mine," exclaimed Sanna, throw-

ing her arms round Rose's neck. "If I'd only gone quietly to Sister Mabel and told her the ball was over the paling, she'd have sent for it, I know. And then I could have prevented your getting over the paling, only I was too naughty."

So the merry play hour passed sadly away to the two "red ribbons," each endeavouring to comfort her companion, while her own heart sank lower and lower, as time passed on, and every attempt to scale the paling failed. Presently the evening prayer-bell rang, and after a while they heard voices calling them all over the playground.

"Here, Sister Ruth, here, we are here," cried Rose; and Sister Ruth following the sound, looked through the hole and saw the two little culprits on the other side.

Let us pass over that sad evening, Sister Mabel's disappointment and sorrow at such a daring defiance from two "red ribbons," the wondering looks of the other girls, Rose's bitter shame, and poor little Sanna's terror when they were told that a report of their conduct would be sent in to the Superior and the chaplain. The next day—that day which had rendered the "store-room" so hateful to Rose—brought Mr. Neville's decision, they must forfeit their good-conduct badges. Rose knew this must come for herself, but she had hoped Sanna might have escaped, and now her own shame and sorrow were absorbed in grief for the disgrace she had brought on her friend. She sought Sister Mabel, and pleaded Sanna's cause with such earnestness, taking the whole blame on herself so entirely, concealing nothing, excusing nothing, that the Sister's eyes filled with happy tears. But she could not reverse Sanna's sentence, neither did she desire it. Deliberate disobedience, she explained to Rose, made the tenure of the good-conduct badge impossible, and even Rose was forced at last to confess that Sanna had been guilty of this fault, though in a less degree than herself. Her grief, however, redoubled, as she admitted it.

"But it was my fault, only mine, I made her naughty, oh, what shall I do!" she cried despairingly.

"Help her, my child," said the Sister, folding the weeping girl in her arms, "let it be your study now, to help, as much as you have hindered her. And not her only. You now feel how terrible it is to have been the cause of another's fall. Oh, Rose, if this is such a grief even now, think how dreadful it would be at the last great day, to know that our example, our advice, our unfaithfulness, had lost another's soul, perhaps the soul of one we greatly loved."

Rose shuddered, and the Sister tried to lead her mind on to the *future still* before her, and the possibility of showing her penitence

by a careful avoidance of those faults of temper, which had been the root of all her present trouble.

The little girl left the Sister's presence cheered and hopeful; but Sister Mabel felt much anxiety as to the effect the loss of her position in the orphanage would produce in her. Great, therefore, was her thankfulness, when she witnessed the child's subdued, yet cheerful bearing, her careful observance of all rules and performance of all her little duties, and the tender sisterly affection with which she seemed to watch over poor little Sanna. As to that little maid she drooped in silent misery, not so much under her own disgrace, but for that which she told herself she had been the means of bringing on her companion. Sanna's character was somewhat inclined to be morbid and desponding, and it was fortunate for her that Rose was so remarkably the reverse.

"It's no use crying over spilt milk," was the latter's homely observation one day, as she saw tears silently falling down Sanna's cheeks. "I wish you wouldn't look so dismal, Sanna. I know what you're going to say," she added, "but Sanna, dear, I wish you would see that I have no one to thank but myself for all my trouble."

"I can't think how you can be so cheerful," sighed Sanna.

"Don't you remember Mr. Neville's sermon last Sunday?" said Rose. "He said there was nothing so stupid as for people when they had done wrong to sit down and whine and pine about it: that they might cry as much as they pleased at first, the more the better, as St. Peter did, but that then they must set to work as hard as they could and do the very reverse of all the bad things they had been doing, and though they couldn't very likely undo the mischief, yet they could show they were ashamed of it, and hated it, and never meant to do so any more if they could help it. And he said, wasn't that much better and braver than sitting down and twiddling one's thumbs, and crying 'it can't be helped'?"

"Did he say that?" said Sanna doubtfully.

"Well, not exactly in those words," replied Rose, "but that was what he meant, and I liked it so; it seemed almost as if the sermon had been on purpose for me."

And on these principles the honest-hearted girl had set to work to prove her penitence. No one knew, not even Sanna, how many trials pressed upon her heart. Isabella's sneers, the unkindness of many of her less worthy companions, the little humiliations, keenly felt, necessarily following on the loss of her position; above all the dread lest she had forfeited the Sister's confidence. But of these things she never spoke, though her pillow was often wet with tears, as she lay weeping in the quiet night, over the sorrows against

which she bore herself so bravely during the day. "I have deserved it, it is my just punishment," were the words with which she restrained herself under her little daily trials and provocations, and so the brave child persevered, and under her influence even Sanna grew cheerful and hopeful at last.

Such was Rose Madeleine Berger. We need scarcely say much about Isabella Wheeler. She and Rose had been brought up under the same influences, tended with the same watchful and loving care. What was the cause of so great a difference between them?

It was this, (and I pray all children who read this book to mark it well) the one resisted and frustrated the Grace of GOD; the other laid her whole heart open to Its influences; so the one drove the Holy Presence further and further from her, while the other, by means of her loving obedience to its impulses, was being continually drawn nearer and nearer to it. "For to him that hath shall more be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

CHAPTER IX.

BLUE RIBBONS AND RED.

SUNDAYS at St. Mary's were very pleasant days; at least, so thought Lydia. She liked the feeling of leisure; the quiet gathering in the schoolroom or playground, where the children learnt their Scripture or Hymns, or read their 'Sunday books.'

There was no obligatory learning on the Sunday, but the children were required to look over the Gospel or Epistle for the day, which had been learnt during the week. This was afterwards said in class. A lesson had been given upon it on the Friday previous, and on the Sunday the children, after repeating it, were expected to give their explanations and recollections of the lesson. This was a favourite exercise with them, and Lydia soon took deep interest in it. At first she could do no more than recall the special lesson that had been derived from the Gospel; but before she had been long at St. Mary's, she was able to follow the elder girls in their connection of the Gospel lesson with that of the Epistle, and both with the special petition of the Collect.

It has been mentioned that some of the children had committed

a great deal of Scripture to memory. Lydia had wondered how they found time to do it, but soon found out that much was done on Sunday mornings, before they were summoned into class to repeat the Gospel for the day. It was wholly voluntary on their part. Sister Mabel encouraged it, but never required more than the repetition of the Gospel on the Sunday, and the daily verse of Scripture during the week.

The girls repeated their voluntary lessons to one another. "Hear me say mine," said Rose one Sunday to Lydia; and to her friend's amazement repeated without a mistake the whole of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.

"How do you do it?" asked Lydia. "How can you remember so much?"

"I don't know," answered Rose, "somehow it seems to come so easy. But then I have been a long time about it. I haven't time for more than two verses a day now I'm dormitory girl, but then I find time always on Sunday mornings, and sometimes I learn a verse while we're waiting in chapel before service begins, and sometimes of a Sunday evening."

"I want to learn too," said Lydia, "something I mean besides what I learn in the week. Set me a Sunday lesson, Rose, where shall I begin?"

The two girls, with their heads together over Rose's Bible, turned the leaves backwards and forwards, but could not make up their mind. Lydia, not accustomed like Rose to the melody of the words, to the frequent hearing of their grand solemnity, thought everything too difficult, and before any conclusion was arrived at, the bell rang for the "Gospel class," and they hastened to join it. There was no time that morning for further discussion, as immediately after "Gospel class" they dispersed to get ready for morning service in the Home chapel.

Lydia was not vain, but she did greatly admire their Sunday dress, and, surveying her companions with much complacency, pleased herself with the reflection that she looked as nice as they did.

The Sunday dress of the St. Mary's children consisted of grey frocks with capes of the same, and grey chip bonnets trimmed with light blue ribbon. The winter Sunday dress was the same in colour, though of warm material, and the bonnet ribbons were then dark blue.

Walking in order, two and two, the monitors leading the way, the children passed through the long cloister connecting the orphanage with the central chapel, and took their places on the front benches in the nave nearest the pulpit. Behind them sat such of the inmates of the hospital for incurables as were well enough to

attend the service, and the women patients from the convalescent hospital. On the other side sat the girls of the Home school, behind them, casual inmates, or visitors at St. Mary's, and the men patients from St. Barnabas' and St. Luke's hospitals. The Sisters sat in the chancel, which was very spacious, being a third of the chapel, divided from it by a lofty roodscreen. The altar stood in a deep apse, lighted by five lancet windows filled with magnificent stained glass. The centre one contained a figure of our LORD seated on a throne in attitude of benediction, the others representing the Blessed Virgin and St. Luke on one side, and St. John the Divine and St. Barnabas on the other. Another window in the chancel was filled with a beautiful representation of St. Joseph carrying the Holy Child in his arms. On one side of the chancel was the sacristy, on the other the organ. All the ornaments of the chapel were simple, but very handsome, and little Lydia Lee was not the only person impressed by the solemn beauty of the place.

Very dear was the fair chapel, dedicated to St. John the Divine, to many present and former inmates of the Home of St. Mary and St. John. The recollection of its hearty services, its devout communions, had been very precious to many a heart in after loneliness, and deprivation of means of Grace; the holy lessons learned from its pulpit had been Manna in the wilderness to many a weary soul. Many an unthinking man and woman among those continually changing convalescents had carried away good seed from it in their hearts that afterwards bore fruit to life everlasting. "Dear blessed chapel," Carrie had sometimes called it. She little knew then how blessed the remembrance of it would one day be to *her*.

Sister Ruth and Sister Rachel sat with the children, Sister Mabel occupying her place in the choir. Lydia, as last-comer, sat by Sister Rachel, who helped her to find her places. The singing Lydia thought lovely; the Sisters led, and the whole of the little congregation joined as one. Lydia could read but imperfectly, but she could follow the words by listening to Sister Rachel, and new thoughts and feelings—thoughts of awe, feelings of loving reverence—were gradually taking possession of her young mind.

On the particular Sunday of which we have been speaking, the discussion about Lydia's Scripture lessons was renewed after dinner, while the children were sitting and wandering about the playground before afternoon prayer.

There was one large tree in the playground, and under its shade Rose and Lydia had retired with a Bible over which they whispered in earnest consultation. Carrie and Charlotte sat on the other side, absorbed in their "Sunday story books."

"*Let's ask Carrie,*" said Rose at last, as the question remained

undecided; "Carrie, Lydia wants to learn something extra on Sundays, what do you advise?"

Carrie came round to Rose's side of the tree and took the Bible in her hand. "You loved your mother very much, did you not?" she asked rather hesitatingly of Lydia.

"Oh very much, indeed!" replied the child earnestly.

"Would you not like to learn something about the happy dead?" said Carrie gently. "Listen to this, Lydia;" and she turned to the 7th chapter of the Book of Revelation, and read.

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God Which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb Which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."¹

Carrie's voice was sweet, and she read with deep reverence. Charlotte laid aside her book and listened, and Lydia hung eagerly on every word.

"Oh, that is beautiful," she exclaimed when Carrie had ended, "read it again, Carrie, please."

And Carrie read it again.

"Great tribulation," what does that mean?"

"Great sorrow, dear," said Carrie.

"Ah, then mother did that," said the little girl, "she was often very, very sad. She used to cry so sometimes at night, but I was sleepy, and did not comfort her," and the tears stood in the child's eyes. "Oh Carrie, I wish I had."

¹ Rev. vii. 9—17.

"She is comforted now, dear," replied Carrie. "See—'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'"

"Is not that sweet?" said Charlotte; "but read the bit about the 'great tribulation' again, Carrie."

"Must every one—" she was beginning to say, after Carrie had again complied; but Lydia interrupted—"Carrie, what does that mean—'have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb'?"

"The Lamb means our dear LORD JESUS CHRIST," replied the young monitor, bowing her head reverently. "You know He died that we might live. I mean He took our punishment upon Himself. He was punished instead of us. We wash our robes in His Blood; that is, we wash our souls clean from sin when we humbly confess to Him the naughty things we have done, and ask Him to wash them all away in His most precious Blood, and pray our Heavenly FATHER to forgive us for our dear LORD's sake, because He has already borne the punishment of our sin. Do you understand, Lydia?"

"Not quite," replied the little girl doubtfully.

At this moment Rose was called away, and Carrie, speaking quickly, replied, "Before Rose comes back I will give you a sort of example—only a *sort* of example, mind, but it may help you a little. When Rose lost her medal, poor little Sanna was in the scrape too. Now Rose wanted to be punished for Sanna's fault as well as her own; she begged and prayed Sister Mabel that it might be so. Now if Sister Mabel had agreed, and Rose had been punished for Sanna's fault, supposing Sanna had afterwards been had up before the Mother or Mr. Neville for that same fault, she might have pleaded—'Oh, do forgive me, for Rose's sake, for she has already been punished for this sin of mine.'"

"Did Rose really want to be punished for Sanna?" asked Lydia breathlessly.

"Yes, really," replied Carrie.

"Oh, how Sanna must love her!" exclaimed the child in a tone that seemed to come from the very depths of the heart.

"She *does*," observed Charlotte emphatically.

"I should think so, indeed," replied Lydia with enthusiasm. "Why she can never think she can do enough for her. How noble of Rose!"

"But Lydia, darling," said Carrie earnestly, "think then what we owe our dear LORD, Who had no sin whatever of His own to bear, and yet suffered such a dreadful punishment for all ours. I am sure we ought to think we can never do enough for Him."

"Yes," replied Lydia heartily; but she was thinking with loving

admiration of Rose, who was now returning to them across the playground. "Carrie," she whispered hastily, as Rose drew near, "was Rose's losing her medal a 'great tribulation?'"

"I am sure it was," said Charlotte, answering instead of Carrie.

"Then it will do her good?"

"Yes, indeed."

"But how?"

Before Carrie could reply Rose had seated herself in her former place, and in the pause that ensued Charlotte remembered that she had not asked her question.

"Must every one, do you suppose, Carrie, pass through 'great tribulation' before they can get to Heaven?"

"I suppose so," replied Carrie hesitatingly.

"But that frightens me," observed Charlotte. "I am so very happy, I don't at all like to think I must go through 'great tribulation.'"

"Nor I," said Rose, looking up with a face that seemed as if sorrow could never cloud it.

"Why should GOD send us sorrow," resumed Charlotte, "when He loves us so? Mr. Neville is always repeating over and over again that GOD loves us so much better than our nearest and dearest friends, that He always wills our happiness, that *all* our joys, little and great, come from Him, so why must we pass through great tribulation?"

"I don't want to pass through any," observed Lydia.

"But you have already passed through some?" said Carrie, smiling.

"Have I?" said Lydia amazed.

"Was not your dear mother's death a tribulation, and your coming here, and being separated from your brother? I am sure," said Carrie, smiling again at the recollection, "you thought that a 'great tribulation' at the time."

"So I did," replied Lydia, gravely, "but I don't now, I am very happy."

Ah, dear little Lydia, if Carrie had had more knowledge and experience, she would doubtless have suggested that a day may come when we may look back on all our trials, and say with you, "I thought it tribulation once, I do not now, it has brought me that which makes me so happy."

But this did not suggest itself then to Carrie, and she only observed, "I am so glad, Lydia, dear. I thought you would be happy when once you were settled."

"But about the tribulation," said Rose, returning to the original question, "why is it sent? why must we have to bear it?"

"As a punishment, I suppose," said Charlotte, thinking of what had been said about Rose's medal.

"Oh, but Charlotte," exclaimed Lydia, "what had I done that GOD should punish me by taking away my mother? I know I was naughty sometimes,—very often, I mean; but that is such a dreadful punishment!" And at the very idea of such a judgment on her childish faults, the little girl hid her face in Carrie's lap.

They were all now out of their depth.

"We must ask Sister Mabel about it," observed Carrie, "for I am sure I don't understand it, only I am quite sure of one thing, and that is, that sorrow must somehow or other be good for us, though we don't know how."

"Why are you so sure, Carrie?" asked Lydia, looking up.

"Because of the *exceeding* love of GOD our FATHER," replied Carrie, her blue eyes sparkling with animation, "the love He shows to all of us every day, and all day long; the *exceeding* love of our dear LORD, Who endured such dreadful things for us, and is so sweetly patient with us; always forgiving, and forgiving, and forgiving, without end; and the *exceeding* love of GOD the HOLY SPIRIT, Who goes on helping us, though we provoke Him so,—helping, helping, always helping, every day, and all day long. Is it likely such love could do anything but what is best and most loving towards us?"

There was silence in the little group. They could not understand the mystery of sorrow; but they could understand something of the Love that encompassed them, and involuntarily the four children raised their eyes to the cloudless sky above them. For several minutes no one spoke or moved. At last Carrie remembered some monitorial duty she had to perform, and walked off; Rose, passing her arm round her waist, accompanied her. Charlotte resumed her reading, and Lydia commenced spelling out with great diligence and earnestness the passage of Scripture they had been discussing. But in a little while she looked off her Bible, and fixing her eyes on Charlotte's medal, seemed lost in thought.

"Charlotte," said she presently, observing that her companion had finished a chapter in her book, and yawned very much as she turned to another, "don't read any more of that stupid book just now."

"It isn't at all stupid," said Charlotte.

"Then why do you yawn?"

"Oh, I don't know, I suppose I am tired of reading."

"Then talk to me," said Lydia.

"Very well," replied Charlotte, shutting her book, "what about?"

"Why, I want you to explain something to me. I want you to tell me the difference between the blue ribbons and the red; and why the blue ribbons are higher than the red; (I think the red are much the prettiest;) and there's another thing—you know that young woman dressed in grey, the colour of our frocks, and with such a pretty bonnet trimmed with blue, who sat by Sister Ruth in chapel, and afterwards came to Sister Mabel's room, and is there still, I think,—I want to know why, when some of the children said 'Who's that gone into Sister's room?' Carrie said, 'It's Sophy Seabright, she's an old child of Mary.' What could she mean? What can an 'old child' be, and an 'old child of Mary!' I asked Sanna, and she said, 'Oh, an old blue ribbon;' but that didn't explain, and I meant to ask Rose, only I forgot."

Charlotte laughed so much, that at first she could not answer. At last she replied, "You goose, can't you understand that 'an old blue ribbon' means an old monitor come back on a visit?"

"Yes," said Lydia, "but an 'old child,' and 'an old child of Mary,' what can that mean?"

Charlotte looked very much amused as she said, "I'd better answer your first question about the ribbons, and then you'll understand all about it. First look at my medal, it is different to the medal the 'blue ribbons' wear."

Lydia looked. It was an oval medal, bearing on one side a Cross and the Sacred Monogram, on the other, a figure of St. Joseph, with a lily in his hand, and the text, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD." The blue ribbon medal differed from it, Charlotte explained, in this respect, that instead of a figure of St. Joseph, it bore one of the Blessed Virgin, and the words, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word."

"Now this medal of mine," said Charlotte, "we call St. Joseph's medal. It is given to those who have good marks for a year, and are supposed to be doing their best. It is worn on a red ribbon because red is the colour which means 'Love,' and Mr. Neville says that 'Love' is the beginning of all true service. The other medal is called the St. Mary's medal, and worn on a blue ribbon, because the colour blue is the emblem of 'truth,' and it is given to those who have been faithful to their red ribbons and proved their service to be *true*,—who can be thoroughly trusted, do you understand? and so are considered to be monitors among the rest. That's the reason why all the blue ribbons are monitors."

"Is that why we wear blue ribbons on our bonnets on Sundays?" asked Lydia.

"Not exactly; you see our orphanage is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and blue is our Lady's colour."

Lydia turned Charlotte's medal over and over in her hand, pondering this piece of information, and then said, "And what does 'an old child of Mary,' mean?"

"Why, I must tell you," replied Charlotte, "that all those who have been fortunate enough to win the St. Mary medal are called the 'Children of Mary,' and when they leave the orphanage they still keep their medal and then belong to a Confraternity called 'The Children of Mary.'"

"What's a—that hard word?" interrupted Lydia.

"Confraternity? Oh, it means a band, a number of persons bound to do some particular thing, and who have to keep some particular rule."

"And what do the 'Children of Mary' do?" asked Lydia.

"Why they are to try to imitate the Blessed Virgin in all things. You see their motto is 'Behold the handmaid of the LORD.' Well they try to be like handmaids of the LORD. And then the second part of their motto is, 'Be it unto me according to thy word,' so they ought to try to be like the Blessed Virgin, and have no will at all except our LORD's. But see," said Charlotte, suddenly interrupting herself, "here come three blue ribbons, Carrie, and Miriam, and Martha, and Sister Ruth with them; now Sister Ruth will tell you all about it much better than I can; do you know she was once a blue ribbon herself."

"What, Sister Ruth?" said Lydia surprised.

"Yes, it's so sad, like a story in a book. Sister Ruth was once an orphan here, and a 'child of Mary,' and after she was grown up she married the schoolmaster at Kirkminster: and a fever broke out in the town and some of the children caught it, and the school was shut up, and Sister Ruth's husband went to see some of the sick children, and he took the fever and died; and Sister Ruth had a baby, such a little beauty, and that died too. So poor Sister Ruth came to Sister Mabel quite broken-hearted to be comforted, and then she couldn't bear to go away; so she begged the Mother to let her be a Sister.—And we love her so, and she tells us stories about what she did when she was one of us, and when she was in service after she left, for she was nurse for some time in a gentleman's family down at Kirkminster."

Sister Ruth was now so near, that the last part of Charlotte's tale was whispered lest she should overhear it. She and the blue ribbons, with Rose, Harriet, and two or three others who had joined them, came straight towards the tree, where Charlotte and Lydia made room for them, and contrived in so doing to establish

themselves one on each side of Sister Ruth. "She has come out of great tribulation," was the thought in Lydia's mind, as she looked at her with a sort of pitying admiration.

"You're the very person we wanted, Sister," said Charlotte, when they were all comfortably seated. "I was trying to explain to Lydia about the 'Children of Mary,' but I'm so stupid, I can't explain it at all, so do you tell her."

"The 'Children of Mary,' dear," said Sister Ruth, looking kindly at Lydia, "are those who have taken for their special example the Blessed Mother of our LORD. She, you know, is the greatest of all the saints, the very queen of saints, for only think what she must have been, how holy, how pure, for our dear LORD to have passed over every other woman and chosen her, and only her, to be His Mother."

"Mr. Neville bade us observe last 8th of September, do you remember, Sister?" interposed Miriam, "that our LORD chose His Blessed Mother should be poor and of low estate, to put her example, as it would seem, within reach of even the very poorest cottage girl."

"Yes," said Rose, "and that she should live in the wicked town of Nazareth so that we could never say, 'the place I live in is too bad for me to be like her.'"

"As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters," said Sister Ruth.

"Ah, that was the Father's text," said Martha. "I wonder what he'll make his text next 8th of September."

"The 8th of September is our great day," explained Rose to Lydia, "then all those who can come who have been 'Children of Mary,' meet here, and we have service in the chapel, and the old 'Children of Mary' dine together at our upper table, and the new 'Children of Mary' wait upon them."

"The 8th of September is our Lady's birthday, that is why we keep it," Charlotte explained further.

"And the old 'Children' look so nice, they always come in grey dresses, and with their bonnets trimmed with blue. They're not obliged to do so, but they like it, and I think it is very nice," observed Rose.

"And those that sleep here have the blue ribbon dormitory," said Harriet.

"I showed it you, don't you remember, Lydia?" interrupted Rose. "Sometimes we call it 'our Lady's dormitory.'"

"Why is the Blessed Virgin called 'our Lady'?" asked Lydia.

"Because," said Miriam, "she's greater than the very greatest lady or queen on earth."

"'Though found midst the lowly in state poor and mean,'
She's now, and was even then, though nobody knew it,

'The wonder of angels, of all saints the Queen,'"

observed Sister Ruth.

"And if she were on earth now, Lydia," said Rose, "only think what respect we should show her. Quite as much as we should show the queen, or more, don't you think so, Lydia?"

"Yes," said Lydia slowly, trying to take in this new idea. She had never even heard of the Blessed Virgin before she came here, and her thoughts were indistinct and misty. "But—"

"But what?" said Rose.

"She is dead and gone," said Lydia.

"Gone where, dear?" asked Sister Ruth, stopping Rose and Charlotte who were both commencing a reply.

"To Heaven, I suppose," said Lydia, staring into the Sister's face.

"I should think so!" exclaimed almost all the children unanimously.

"Hush, dears," said Sister Ruth, "don't puzzle the child. And the people in Heaven, Lydia," she continued to the little girl, "are they dead?"

"They are angels, are they not?" said Lydia timidly.

"Certainly not," said Miriam decidedly. "The angels have always been in Heaven, and we are talking of people who have lived on earth, and who have died and been buried, and are now in Heaven."

"Yet Lydia is not so far wrong, Miriam," said Sister Ruth, "for our LORD Himself, speaking of them, says, 'They are as the angels of God in Heaven.'"

"Well, but Lydia, answer Sister Ruth's question," said Miriam in her usual quick decided tones, "the people in Heaven, whether they're angels or saints, are they dead or alive?"

Lydia did not at once answer. A new world seemed to open out before the little girl, a wondrous unseen world. She raised her eyes and gazed long and earnestly at the heavens over her head, and felt almost overwhelmed by the new thoughts presented to her mind of the unseen living dead. She did not answer, and Sister Ruth signed to the children not to disturb her. Presently she turned to Sister Ruth and said in a troubled anxious tone, "Is my mother alive, Sister?"

"Why, Lydia," said Carrie answering, "don't you remember the verses we read just now, 'These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?'"

"Oh, my mother did that, I am sure," exclaimed the little girl bursting into tears, "for she used to say her prayers, and go to church every Sunday."

"Then she is alive, Liddy," said Sister Ruth cheerfully, "think of her as such, alive, and at rest, and very very happy."

"And your husband and your little baby, are they alive too, Sister?" asked the wondering child.

"Oh, Lydia!" exclaimed Charlotte, shrinking a little. But Sister Ruth smiled brightly as she answered, "Certainly they are, dear, alive and happy beyond all thought. My darling babe! I have my SAVIOUR'S own assurance of his perfect bliss; and of my husband I have no doubt, for he dearly loved his LORD and Master, and the word of that LORD and Master cannot fail, and He has promised, 'He that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.' 'Because I live ye shall live also,' and 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.'"

There was a pause. Lydia's eyes again turned to the blue sky above her. The first to speak again was Miriam. "You see, Lydia, the saints, and the happy dead are as much alive as if they were still on earth. More alive, because they can never die again."

"And it is our firm belief in their life, and love, and that they sympathise with us just as much as dear absent friends sympathise with those whom they are separated from, but still love, which we express when we say in the Creed we repeat every day, 'I believe in the *Communion of Saints*,'" observed Sister Ruth.

"And so we keep our Lady's birthday, just as we should keep the Mother Superior's birthday, even if she were not at St. Mary's," said Rose.

"Or as people in a colony might keep their Queen's birthday, though she might be thousands of miles away," suggested the Sister.

"And so all saints' days," added Carrie, "as days of remembrance; birth-days or death-days, of brothers and sisters beloved indeed, whom we hope one day to meet face to face. Just as you would remember Mark's birthday, I am sure, Lydia, though he would keep it at Lowton and you at St. Mary's."

Lydia clapped her hands; this illustration came readily home. Her companions all smiled.

"But now, once more about the example of our Blessed Lady," said Sister Ruth. "We are all bound to follow it, and we are all her daughters who are trying to do so, whether we belong to a Confraternity called 'The Children of Mary,' or not. All the saints are our examples, but Blessed Mary is the special example to girls and women of everything that a woman ought to be."

"Yes," said Carrie, "as Mr. Neville said in his sermon, we cannot imagine the Mother of our Blessed LORD ever being out of temper, or peevish, or sullen, or conceited, or vain, or idle, or self-indulgent, or a gossip."

"Or vulgar," interrupted Miriam, "I remember particularly he said—or vulgar."

"What does that mean?" asked Lydia.

"Loud and noisy, and boisterous, and talking of things one shouldn't speak of," explained Sister Ruth.

"Being rude," suggested Carrie, "and hurting people's feelings, eh, Sister?"

"Yes, dear," answered the Sister.

"Being nasty," said Miriam with a look of disgust.

"Yes," said the Sister again; "and I think we cannot imagine her ever being untidy, or neglecting herself. It's one thing to be vain, and another to be neat and clean."

"Nor would she ever like silly talking, and foolish jokes," said Miriam.

"But we can think of her as very merry, eh, Sister?" said Rose looking up quickly.

"Oh, yes," replied the Sister, "always sweet and cheerful."

"But merry," persisted Rose.

"Yes, merry," said Sister Ruth, smiling; and taking Rose's laughter-loving face in both her hands, she kissed her forehead.

"Oh dear, there's that tiresome bell," exclaimed Rose, as the chapel bell began to ring its summons to afternoon prayers.

"I am sure Blessed Mary would never have said that, when the bell called her to worship her LORD," said Sister Ruth gently.

"Oh, Sister, darling, but I'm such a long way off yet, from being a 'Child of Mary,'" replied Rose almost sadly.

"Not a bit of it," replied the Sister, patting Rose's cheek, "no one is a long way off, who has a loving heart, and a ready will."

Rose kissed her fondly, and so the little party broke up.

CHAPTER X.

VISITING DAY.

"NEXT Sunday is visiting day, isn't it, Rose?" asked Lydia eagerly one Friday morning as the girls were assembling for school.

"First Sunday in the month, yes," replied Rose considering.

As Sister Mabel walked round the classes that morning, Lydia timidly held out her copy-book for inspection.

"Very well, Lydia, you have improved very much," said the Sister, stopping to examine it.

Lydia crimsoned with pleasure.

"Conceited toad!" muttered Isabella, "who else would have thought of holding out their copy-book?"

Sister Mabel still held the book in her hand and was turning over the leaves. "Let me see, you have been here about four weeks," said she, "and Sunday will be your first visiting day, I think. Well, you will have the pleasure of telling your brother that you have been trying to please him, and that Sister Mabel is very well satisfied with your progress." The Sister passed on with a kindly glance at the radiant face of the happy loving child. Never had Lydia looked so beaming, or felt so happy before.

When school was over she bounded into the playground, singing

"Let us all be merry and gay,
For next Sunday is visiting day."

Several of the children joined in the chorus, but Rose and some others laughed and hooted good-humouredly, calling out, "But what are we to do, we poor friendless creatures?"

"Oh," said Charlotte, "we'll comfort you forlorn beings with goodies, if we get any."

"I shall want a deal of comfort then," said Rose.

"Will your brother bring you any goodies?" asked Isabella of Lydia in a fawning voice.

"I don't know," replied Lydia bluntly.

"Ah, if my dear papa were back from India I should look forward to visiting day with as much pleasure as you," sighed Isabella.

"Oh, Isabella, how wicked you are!" exclaimed Lydia in uncontrollable disgust.

"What did she say?" asked Charlotte, surprised at Lydia's vehemence.

"She pretends her father is a gentleman in India, and she knows it's a lie," said Lydia indignantly.

"What did you say?" asked Isabella turning pale with anger.

"She said you know it is a lie, and so you do," said Charlotte firmly. "You must be mad, Isabella, to say such things."

Isabella's face was not pleasant to see, but she forced a laugh and said, "How dull you and Lydia must be, Charlotte, not to be able to take a little joke."

"A joke do you call it?" replied Charlotte dryly, "a very poor one I think it. Come, Lydia, let us go on the stride."

"I'll be even with you one day, Miss Charlotte," muttered Isabella as she watched the two girls. "Here, Jemmy," she called, "come here." Jemmy came. "Don't forget if your grandfather brings you any goodies, they're mine."

"Some of them," suggested Jemmy plaintively.

"You'd better say all," replied Isabella in a threatening tone. "I know one or two of your secrets, my young lady."

Poor Jemmy cowered. A little girl who was with her sighed and said, "I wish we'd never been led by Isabella, Jemmy, she is so spiteful."

"Well we can't help it now," said Jemmy hastily. "If she was to tell of my taking Miriam's shilling (she had ninepence of it,) I should be sent away. And grandfather's so poor, I should have to go to the workhouse."

"Couldn't we tell of her, Jemmy?" suggested her companion.

Jemmy considered. "No, Bessie, we couldn't do it without telling of ourselves, and she keeps out of the scrapes herself. It was all through her I took that shilling, and she had ninepence of it, and Hetty a penny, and you a penny, I'd only a penny left for myself, but then, don't you see, I took it, so the story would tell against me."

"What can we do?" sighed Bessie.

"Keep her in good humour, that's all we can do," replied Jemima. And they went off and joined their tyrant, poor foolish children, and so wound her toils more hopelessly about them.

"Lydia," suggested Rose next Sunday morning, "if you want to sing would you mind sitting some way off? You see we friendless ones are looking over our gospels, and that charming song of yours disturbs us."

Lydia was humming softly to herself,

"O dear, I am so merry and gay,
For this happy Sunday is visiting day."

She laughed at Rose's speech, and moved further off continuing her chant.

"Take care, Liddy," said Charlotte smiling, "I'm acting as monitor this morning, and shall have to report you; for singing before gospel class on Sunday mornings is against rules."

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Lydia, "so it is, I forgot."

"Acting as monitor, are you, my fine lady?" thought Isabella to herself. "Oh, shouldn't I like to take you down a peg."

She looked at Charlotte malevolently, and then whispered to Lydia, "And nothing she'd like better than to report you, just to show how grandly she can play the monitor; and do you know what would be the consequence?"

"No," said Lydia, "what?"

"Why you wouldn't be allowed to see your brother when he came," said Isabella watching her companion to see the effect of this communication.

Lydia coloured with anger. "What a shame!" she exclaimed.

"Do you hear that, Charlotte?" said Isabella, across the form to the senior red ribbon.

"No, what is it? how troublesome you are, Isabella," replied Charlotte rather peevishly, "how can I learn if you keep interrupting?"

"It was Lydia, not me," said Isabella, "she says that if you report her it will be a great shame."

"But I will report her if she interrupts those who are learning, and breaks the rules as well," replied Charlotte, now really angry, jealous for her authority, and vexed that Lydia should, as she supposed, have taken her good-humoured hint seriously.

"Then you'll be very cruel and wicked," burst forth Lydia in a passion of angry tears, alarmed at what Isabella had told her would be the consequence.

Charlotte sprang up. "I'll not stand this," she exclaimed.

"Nonsense, Charlotte," said Rose pulling her down again, "Lydia, don't be a simpleton. Visiting day has got into your head, I think."

"If she reports me," sobbed Lydia, "I'll never speak to her again; no never, never."

In a moment Charlotte was across the room, reporting Lydia as troublesome and insubordinate, and crying with anger because she had warned her not to sing before gospel class. The report was made to Sister Ruth, but at that moment Sister Mabel entered. The whole school rose, and in the hush that followed, the charge was repeated to her. Lydia had not risen. Her head rested on her arms, which were crossed on the desk before her.

Sister Mabel did not immediately speak. Her quick ear detected more of sorrow than anger in the tones of the little girl's weeping, and though ignorant of the causes which had led to this storm, she readily divined that Lydia was distressed at a cloud which had marred the sunshine of her happy day. Then she turned and silently surveyed the young monitor. Two angry spots stood on Charlotte's cheeks, and her bright hazel eyes sparkled with indignation. Sister Mabel guessed here was something more than

appeared on the surface. The monitorial authority must be upheld, but she would sift this matter to the bottom.

"Lydia," she said quietly, "I am sorry you should so have forgotten yourself. I will speak to you after service in my room. Carrie, ring the bell for class."

Lydia felt relieved, Charlotte vexed. She thought her report should have been made more of. Isabella exulted, for she saw that Charlotte's dignity was offended.

"My love, why did you give trouble this morning?" said Sister Mabel after service to the little culprit, "this morning of all mornings, when I thought you were going to be so happy? Breaking rules will not add to any one's happiness, or being disobedient to monitors."

Lydia sobbed out her story, but it was not very clear. The Sister, however, gathered that her tears had flowed in the morning from apprehension of the consequences which she supposed might arise from her untimely song, that she was very sorry that she had spoken improperly to Charlotte, but, and here her tears broke forth afresh, Charlotte had been very cross to her.

"Well, now go and make it up with Charlotte, tell her you are sorry you spoke improperly, and be more careful another time."

"And may I see Mark, Sister?" asked the child eagerly.

"Certainly, my dear. But for his sake and yours, that you two may be thoroughly happy together, put away all unkind thoughts and feelings, and go and be friends with Charlotte at once."

Lydia came forth from the Sister's room a rainbow of tears and smiles. "I am sorry I was so cross, Charlotte," she said to the senior red ribbon, who was reflecting rather uncomfortably on the events of the morning. Charlotte's anger was very shortlived, her arms were about her little companion in a moment, and a mutual kiss restored friendship and drove all unpleasant feelings from Lydia's mind. But alas, for poor Charlotte, Isabella was close by.

"Sister Mabel does not seem to think much of your reports," she said in a tone of seeming sympathy; "she never seems to pay attention to any except the regular monitors. How easily she has let Lydia off; if Carrie had reported hers he would have been in disgrace."

Charlotte winced, and the old feeling of mortified dignity returned.

"What a favourite Lydia is with Sister Mabel," pursued Isabella to the girls within hearing. "If any of us had gone on as she did this morning I am sure we should have heard enough about it. But you see nothing is said to her, and Sister Mabel pays no attention to Charlotte's complaint about her."

"It's a shame, I hate favourites," was the exclamation of two or three.

Charlotte felt angry and aggrieved and made no attempt to check the disparaging remarks which continued to pass around her. A feeling of fresh anger sprang up in her heart against Lydia, and renewed dissatisfaction with Sister Mabel.

She was in this state of mind, when Carrie whispered that Sister Mabel wanted her in her room.

"Charlotte," said the Sister when the girl had shut the door, "I want to ask you about that disturbance this morning. I have heard Lydia's story, now tell me yours again."

Charlotte repeated it with some asperity of tone. The Sister questioned her, and at length drew forth a reluctant admission of her own irritability and hastiness.

"Did you make that report of Lydia from a real wish that the rules should be kept, or to gratify your own angry feelings?"

Charlotte was silent.

"Think it well over, and give me a candid answer. Be honest, my child."

Whatever were Charlotte's faults, she was thoroughly honest, so she presently answered looking down, "I reported her because I felt in a passion."

To this point Sister Mabel had wished to bring her. She spoke a few earnest words on the sin and danger of obeying the dictates of an angry impulse, especially in any one exercising authority of any kind. "Persons in authority should have no personal feelings," she said, "I mean they should utterly ignore any personal offence to themselves, and look on faults they may have to correct as having no connection with themselves whatever. You will have to remember that if ever you are, what I have heard you wish to be, an upper servant, and have to check and control the servants under you." She smiled as she spoke, and patted Charlotte's shoulder.

The girl's sullenness gave way, and she burst into tears. "I have done very wrong," she said, "I have been very unkind."

"Then make amends by being kind and loving to Lydia, and sympathise with her, and all your other companions, in their little troubles and difficulties, and little joys as well. There's the dinner-bell. Let me see no more gloomy faces to-day, let there be as much sunshine in the house as there is without."

Charlotte smiled, curtsied and withdrew, humbled, but much happier. She was "schoolroom girl," and as such had an opportunity of showing patience to Lydia, when just as she was setting off to see her mother, the little girl ran up to her, saying,

"Oh, Charlotte, Sister says I may have my copy-book to show Mark, will you give it me?"

Charlotte resolutely drove back the feeling of impatience rising within her, turned back without fuss or hurry, fetched her key, opened the school box, found the copy-book, gave it kindly to the eager little girl, and having achieved this small victory over her constitutional impatience, ran, with happy beaming face to throw herself into the arms of her widowed mother.

Lydia meantime with cheeks crimsoned with expectation, sat with her copy-book in her hand waiting for Mark's coming.

"Lydia's brother to see her, please, Sister," at length broke upon her delighted ear. She was flying from the room when the scandalised portress caught her by the arm.

"Liddy, dear, make your curtsy to the Sister and say, 'May I go, Sister?' it's what we all do. You must be respectful."

Lydia turned an imploring glance at Sister Mabel, but could not speak. The Sister nodded a smiling answer to the mute appeal, and she darted into the long cloister. With a cry of delight she bounded into Mark's arms, winding her own closely round his neck, and sobbing with irrepressible happiness. Mark was as much moved as herself. He sat down in a deep window-seat in the cloister as far from the other visitors as possible, and for a while the brother and sister remained locked in a silent embrace, their hearts too full to speak.

But Mark could not see his darling cuddled up to his breast like this, so he presently unclasped the clinging arms, and placed her on the ground before him.

"Why, you've grown already, I do believe, Liddy. Why how beautiful you do look surely."

Lydia laughed and clapped her hands. She was a contrast indeed to her former self. So bright and beaming: her dark hair so glossy and smoothly braided, her neat grey dress, and snowy collar, the tidy boots and spotless stockings; where was the slipshod maiden of four weeks back?

Mark gazed and admired, and gazed again; he had expected to find her happy and cared for, but the result exceeded his most sanguine expectations. Again and again he folded her in his arms and stroked her dark hair with his great brown hand. The copy-book was produced to Mark's great admiration. "Why you'll soon be able to write me letters, Liddy, I declare: ah, but I shan't be able to read them, more's the pity."

"O, Mark, when I come home to you I'll teach you," said the child; and then the little tongue ran on telling of everything that *she did*, and that had happened to her since that memorable

Monday on which Mark had left her at St. Mary's, and then she had a hundred questions to ask of Mark, and all the news of Lowton to hear.

How fast the time passed to be sure! An hour was gone in no time, and still the brother and sister had not said half their say.

"Now only think," said Mark, "how dull I am to be sure; but I'm so pleased to see you, Liddy, that I've almost forgot everything: but I've something here I've brought for you;" and he took from his breast pocket a little parcel, wrapped in a piece of brown paper.

"What can it be?" said Lydia. "Ah!" she exclaimed, as Mark unfolded the paper, and produced the little black profile of their mother. "Mother's picture!"

"Have you anywhere to keep it, Liddy?" asked Mark, "I promised mother I'd not let you forget her. There's no fear of my forgetting, but you're a little one, so I thought you should have the picture just to keep you in mind."

"I'll ask Sister if I may hang it up over my bed," said Lydia, kissing her brother first, and then the little likeness.

"Ah, that's right, kiss it. I told mother we'd kiss it," said Mark, "and it would be nice to have it hanging over your bed, then you couldn't well forget." He looked round to see that no one observed him, and then he kissed it too. "Dear mother, it would be hard if we forgot her, Liddy, wouldn't it?"

"Oh yes," said Lydia, and her Sunday talk with Sister Ruth and her companions about the happy dead came back to her recollection. With her arm round Mark's neck, and holding the likeness in her hand, she tried to give him some idea of it.

"Of course she's up in heaven," said Mark; "who'd be there if she's not, I'd like to know; and of course she's praying for us. She said she would, and she always kept her word."

"And if she's praying for us up in heaven, of course she's alive," observed Lydia, carrying on the thought to its natural conclusion.

In spite of his firm belief in his mother's happiness, and his mother's prayers, Mark had never thoroughly realised her actual living state, but as his little sister spoke, the idea struck him very forcibly. "Of course she is," he said, "I'm glad you said that, Liddy, I've thought of her too much in the churchyard, so I have." And, as Lydia had done before, he involuntarily looked through the window up into the summer sky.

"And Sister Ruth says that all good people that ever lived are living still," said Lydia, "so nobody's really dead, eh, Mark?"

"No," said Mark, mastering this new thought, "only separated from us for a time, as you and I are separated, Liddy."

"Oh, not quite the same," said Lydia, clasping her brother's neck still closer, "for we cannot see them."

"But we shall some day, Liddy; we shall see mother again one day."

"Oh, a long time on," said Lydia; adding shudderingly, "You must not die, Mark, you are quite far enough off, and I *must* see you sometimes, or I shall die too."

"I do believe the lassie's crying," said Mark, and so indeed she was. "Come now," said her brother, "keep your tears till they're wanted; I don't look much like death yet I fancy. Now dry your eyes, and I'll give you a keepsake to make you remember me."

"I don't think I'm likely to forget you," replied Lydia, half laughing, "but I should like the keepsake for all that. What is it, Mark, a lock of your hair?"

"O something much better than that," said Mark, and out of his pocket he took a sixpence with a hole pierced in it.

"An old sixpence! how funny!" laughed Lydia.

"An 'old sixpence!' a *lucky* sixpence you should say," rejoined Mark, smiling, adding the old joke, "if you always keep this sixpence by you, Liddy, you'll never want for a piece of money as long as you live."

"Really!" exclaimed Lydia, greatly impressed.

Mark roared with laughter, and at last she saw the jest.

"Well, never mind," she retorted, "I never do mean to part with it, so I shall always have it. If Sister will give me leave, I'll wear it round my neck."

"I should like to see that good lady of yours so much, Liddy," said Mark, after she had done hugging him for the sixpence.

"Sister Mabel?" said Lydia.

"Ay, if that be her name. Can you manage for me to see her? I've something very particular I want to say to her."

"I'll go and ask directly," returned Lydia, "and you must call her 'Sister' when you speak to her; we all call her so. And she's so dear and good, you'll love her so, I know."

"Well, do you manage for me to see her," said Mark; and away ran Lydia on her errand.

Sister Mabel sat writing at her desk in the schoolroom. She looked up as the little girl entered in breathless haste. "Well, Lydia, what's the matter?"

"May Mark see you, Sister? he has something very particular he wants to say."

"I will come to him," said the Sister, rising; "but hark! there's the chapel-bell. It is just four o'clock, Lydia, and visiting hours are over for to-day."

Lydia could hardly refrain from tears.

"Hush," said Sister Mabel, "don't cry, my dear." She wrote something on a slip of paper, and giving it to Lydia, added, "Take this to your brother, and tell him we are all going now to afternoon service in the chapel, and if he would like to go too, he may give this paper to the Sister he will see at the chapel door, and she will show him where to sit, and then if he comes into the waiting-room after service, I will hear all he has to say."

Lydia was delighted, and so was Mark. He sat with the men patients from St. Barnabas' and St. Luke's, and greatly enjoyed the hearty cheerful service, but it is to be feared that the knowledge he was there sadly disturbed his little sister's devotions. After service, Sister Mabel called Lydia to her, and they both went into the waiting-room where stood Mark, hat in hand. Lydia crept up to him, threw her arms round him, and buried her face in his waistcoat.

"I wanted to see you in particular, ma'am," said Mark, after the Sister had said a few kind words to set him at ease, "for to thank you for the kindness you've shown for this poor little lass. I'm a bad one to say what I mean, but what I want to say is this: If there be ever anything as I can do for you,—I'm but a poor ignorant fellow—that I'm your man, and I hope you'll call upon me."

"I will indeed, Mark," said the Sister, smiling.

"And ma'am, I do hope as Lydia will prove herself conformable and grateful."

"She has been a very good little girl hitherto, and I trust she will continue so," replied the Sister.

Lydia looked up with swimming eyes.

"You've been a mother to her," said Mark; "what ever would she have done without you, ma'am!"

"Call her 'Sister,'" whispered Lydia, "we call her 'Sister.'"

"If it weren't a liberty I'd call her 'Mother,'" said Mark, bluntly.

"Well, call me 'Mother' if you like," said Sister Mabel.

"And he shall be your son, Sister," said the little girl, running up to her. "I am your child, am I not, Sister? so Mark must be your son."

"Clearly," answered the Sister; and then they all laughed, and Mark coloured and looked down, but very much pleased.

"But I must turn my son out now," observed Sister Mabel, cheerfully, "glad as I am to see him; and Lydia and I must look forward till next visiting day. But Mark," she added, "if you had any place to eat your dinner in, and any means of disposing of yourself till visiting time, which begins at two, and would like

to come on visiting Sundays to the morning service in our chapel I will give you an order for it. The service begins at eleven, and you can always sit where you did this afternoon."

Lydia clapped her hands, and Mark accepted the offer eagerly.

"But where will you eat your dinner, and what will you do till two o'clock?" asked Lydia.

"Do *you* ask that, you gipsy?" said Mark; "where could I find better lodging and dining-room these warm days than on the heath?"

"But when the cold days come?"

"Wait till they do," said Mark, merrily. "Let's enjoy the warm days as long as we can."

"Quite right, Mark," said the Sister, "people would be much happier if they always did so. We shall see you, then, I hope, next visiting Sunday in chapel."

The extreme pleasure this arrangement gave both Mark and Lydia, took the edge, almost entirely, off the pain of parting. Mark returned to Lowton in high spirits, and though Lydia felt a pang as the door closed behind him, she comforted herself with the recollection of the happy time they had just spent together, and the thought of the happy times yet to come.

As she returned with Sister Mabel to the schoolroom, she kissed the gentle hand she held more than once, and confided to her the history of Mark's gifts. Might she hang the likeness over her bed? she asked, and wear the sixpence round her neck? She obtained leave to do both, and further permission to go to the dormitory after tea and hang up the little portrait.

Lydia was very happy that evening. Only one thing she wanted, and that was a string of some kind on which to hang the sixpence.

"Oh, I can help you, then," said Carrie; "see, here's a piece of narrow red ribbon just the thing."

"Oh, thank you, Carrie," cried the little girl; "and red too! Charlotte said that the colour red meant 'love,' so it is just the thing indeed, isn't it, Carrie?"

Carrie, amused at the child's pleasure, helped to fasten the sixpence on the ribbon. It was found to be too short to pass over Lydia's head, so the next day, after school, Carrie's clever fingers lengthened it by another short piece of similar ribbon she found among her stores, dexterously joining it by almost invisible stitches.

"Oh, thank you, dear Carrie, so much," said the little girl, when this business was accomplished. "But oh!" she sighed, as she hung the sixpence round her neck, "what a long time a whole month seems to wait till Mark comes again!"

"Ah! but think what a famous opportunity it gives you of

getting up in the school, and altogether astonishing him," said Carrie.

That was a great thought indeed !

CHAPTER XI.

LYDIA'S LUCKY SIXPENCE.

IT was undoubtedly true that Lydia needed no keepsake to make her remember her brother, but it was an equally undoubted fact that the 'lucky sixpence' did serve as a constant reminder to the affectionate child of her absent brother's love and the object for which she was working.

She hugged it to her when she sat down to lessons or work in her class; she kissed it furtively when her efforts received a quiet word of commendation from any of her teachers. At night she hung it on the nail that suspended the little likeness of her mother, and the putting it on in the morning was to her *in fact*, though doubtless she would not so have expressed it in words, like putting on the gentle yoke of love under which she worked so happily, because so lovingly, all day.

Now it happened one morning that not having risen at the first call she was rather behind her companions in dressing, and hurried accordingly. The chapel-bell rang for prayers just as the last girl in the dormitory stayed back, at her whispered entreaty, to fasten her frock with impatient jerks. This operation was performed near the door, and there was no time to run back to her bed for the sixpence. She was only just in time to slip through the chapel door before Sister Ruth closed it, and she knelt in her place hurried and confused, and with woefully wandering thoughts; for while she repeated her morning prayers with her lips, her mind was occupied with plans for the recovery of her sixpence before the business of the day should begin. This was not altogether an easy matter, for immediately on leaving the chapel each girl walked off to her housework or needlework, and no one was allowed to return to the dormitory after it had been left in the morning, without special permission. This permission Lydia was by no means sanguine of obtaining. "Sister Ruth will ask me how I came to leave my sixpence behind," she reasoned with herself, as her companions were singing their hymn, "and I shall be obliged to own that I did not get up directly I was called, and so was late; and

then she'll say the sixpence must hang there all day as a punishment."

It was very likely indeed; so likely, that Lydia abstained from asking leave as utterly useless, but she determined to obtain the sixpence nevertheless.

As the rest of the needlework class followed Sister Ruth to the store-room, Lydia slipped unperceived from amongst them, and darted up to the dormitory. The housework had lately been changed all round, and Charlotte now occupied Rose's place as head dormitory girl.

"Back, back," she exclaimed, as she saw Lydia hastily entering, and placed herself and her broom so as to effectually bar further progress. "You know it is against rules to come into the dormitory without leave."

Lydia, in dread of her absence from the working class being discovered, struggled to pass. "Charlotte, let me go, I will not be a minute, I want to fetch something."

"Not without leave," said Charlotte; "have you leave?"

How one wrong step leads to another! Lydia's fears increasing lest her disobedience should be discovered, she pushed Charlotte angrily, saying, "I *will* go by, I *will* pass, you shall not prevent me."

Charlotte's high spirit was now fairly roused. She threw down her broom, and seizing Lydia by both arms, tried to force her out of the room.

"Fighting! actually fighting! can I believe my eyes?" exclaimed a voice beside them, and there stood Sister Rachel, looking the very picture of astonishment.

The girls let go simultaneously, and both coloured crimson with shame.

"What is it all about? what can you possibly be doing?"

"Lydia wanted to come into the dormitory without leave, and she wouldn't go back when I told her, so I tried to put her out," replied Charlotte, burning with vexation at having been discovered in the act of enforcing her authority as head of the dormitory in so unseemly a manner.

"Is this it, Lydia?" asked Sister Rachel.

Lydia burst into tears, it was impossible to gainsay it.

"Go down stairs," said the Sister gravely, "it will be my duty to report you."

Lydia obeyed, crying bitterly.

"Do you consider that a proper way of keeping order, Charlotte?" said Sister Rachel; "struggling—indeed I may call it *fighting—with your companions?*"

"Sister Mabel said I was to see that the dormitory rules were kept," replied Charlotte, speaking rather sullenly from very shame.

"Certainly you are. But by violence?"

Charlotte was silent.

"What did Lydia want?"

"She said she wanted to fetch something."

"What?"

"I don't know, Sister."

"Did you not ask her?"

"No, Sister."

"Nor offer to fetch it?"

"No," and then her own fault, her pride and temper, rose up before the hasty but generous-tempered girl. "It was all my fault," she thought to herself, but pride checked the acknowledgment to the Sister. She returned to her work, grieved and vexed with herself, and determined, if any trouble should befall Lydia in consequence, she would instantly speak out and take the blame on herself. When, however, she found that Sister Mabel, on hearing the whole story, had merely said to Lydia, "You must be content to let the sixpence hang where it is all to-day, and to-morrow you will bring it to me, and I shall keep it from you for a week," Charlotte thought her companion far too leniently dealt with; and when Sister Mabel afterwards gave her a warning against this fresh instance of her hasty temper, she felt aggrieved. Isabella's odious insinuation of favouritism recurred to her mind, and her own penitence subsided into a feeling of injury.

Poor Lydia, in the midst of her trouble and dismay, took comfort in the reflection that she should at least enjoy the company of her sixpence all night, and her tears flowed afresh when she found on going to bed that it had been removed from its peg.

"Lydia," said Sister Mabel, gravely, the next morning after school, "you have not brought me your sixpence as I desired you."

"Sister, I have not got it, or I would, indeed," replied Lydia, earnestly.

"Who has it?" said the Sister.

Lydia supposed that Sister Rachel had taken possession of it.

Charlotte said she knew nothing about it. She did not know it was the sixpence which Lydia was going to fetch, and she had not noticed it. But when on Sister Rachel's return from St. Joseph's, she stated that it had not occurred to her to take charge of the sixpence, and that she had left it hanging where it was, Lydia was in consternation, and Sister Mabel much disturbed. The dormitory was searched, but without effect, and Charlotte, still sore at the event of yesterday, and annoyed at Lydia's pertinacity and the

questions put to her on all sides, exclaimed, "You seem to think I've taken it, by the way you go on," turned sulky, and would not answer another inquiry.

One thing was certain, the sixpence was gone, but where, nobody had the least idea.

Poor Lydia's distress was pitiable, but anger mingled with it. "It's all Charlotte's fault, cross, disagreeable Charlotte!" she exclaimed. And the angry words added fresh fuel to Charlotte's wrath.

Sister Mabel was troubled—troubled at Charlotte's temper; but still more so at the mysterious disappearance of the sixpence. That any one had stolen it never for one moment entered her mind, but she did fear that some girl might have hidden it to enjoy a mischievous practical joke at the expense of poor little Lydia's feelings. She had overheard some of the children laughing at the "fuss" their companion was making about an old sixpence, and she determined to discover what had become of it.

At her desire, Sister Ruth called Lydia away, and she then addressed her little flock seriously on the unkindness of playing with another's feelings, the cruelty of making a joke at another's expense, the sin of stirring up wrath and ill-will. "I don't for one instant suspect any of you of having taken this sixpence for your own use, but I do fear one or other of you may have hidden it to torment Lydia, perhaps from no really unkind motive at first, but it is worse than unkindness to persist in such a trick. I therefore call upon the girl who has hidden the sixpence to step forward at once and give it up, and I shall expect her to return it with her own hands to Lydia, and to apologise for the distress she has occasioned her."

So spoke Sister Mabel, but nobody moved. "Well?" said the Sister, expecting the sixpence to be immediately produced. But still no one spoke, and no sixpence appeared.

"Am I to understand," she continued, at length, "that you *all* mean to deny having taken it?" She looked at Charlotte as she spoke.

"I know nothing at all about it, Sister," said Charlotte, replying to the look. "Nor I," "Nor I," cried several eager voices. And then the chorus of "Nor I," "Nor I," became general. The whole orphanage denied knowledge of Lydia's sixpence.

Sister Mabel sat down in surprise, and pondered. There was a short silence, and then she said very slowly and solemnly, "My dears, you have all denied knowledge of this business, and I am bound to believe you. The matter must rest here for the present, *but I trust every one of you will, for love's sake, do your utmost*

to find and restore to your companion her brother's little gift, which you all know she prizes so highly."

She paused again, then added, looking away from the children, that none might think she suspected any one in particular, "And I do hope and pray, that if any of you have been betrayed into so sinful an act as first to commit this wrong and then tell a lie to conceal it, that such a one may yet have grace, even now, to confess her fault, and make what reparation she can."

Another pause. The children looked eagerly one to another. Sister Mabel waited a few moments to see if any responded to her appeal, and as none did so, she slowly left the room, and went to consult with the Sisters Rachel and Ruth as to what could be done to clear up this uncomfortable mystery.

Nothing, however, could be devised or suggested. No one had been in the dormitory that morning but Charlotte, and two scrubbers, and these two scrubbers had been Caroline and Mary Anne, the monitors, who were above suspicion. Charlotte appealed fearlessly to them, but they could only say that they had not observed the sixpence themselves, and were quite sure that no one had been in the dormitory whilst they were cleaning it. When they had done, Charlotte, according to custom, had locked the dormitory door, and had laid the key on Sister Mabel's rostrum. And here Sister Mabel could testify that she immediately hung it on the bunch of keys by her side, and it had never been out of her possession till she gave it in the evening to Sister Ruth; and Lydia witnessed that when she went up to her bed that night the sixpence was already gone.

To all debates on the subject, Charlotte listened with an air of lofty, almost contemptuous, unconcern. Day after day passed by; no sixpence appeared; and the children had almost forgotten it, when the subject suddenly revived.

Sister Mabel one morning opened the alms-box, and suddenly exclaimed, "Why, Lydia, this must be your sixpence, it has a hole in it."

Lydia darted across the room and seized the sixpence, but immediately returned it with a look of disappointment, saying sadly, "Ah, no, Sister, it is not mine."

"Why are you so sure of that?" inquired Sister Mabel.

"Because, Sister, mine was more worn, and I had scratched an M on one side, and an S on the other, for 'Mark Staunton.'"

Caroline said she remembered Lydia doing so. So Sister Mabel put the sixpence into her purse, and said nothing more about it. But the children again took up the almost forgotten subject, and an insinuation began to be whispered among them, though no one

knew who first suggested it, that after all Charlotte was the only person who could know anything about it. Charlotte heard, and her proud nature—proud of her unimpeachable integrity and conscious truth—felt it deeply—withered under it as an almost unendurable humiliation. But not a word did she say. She treated her companions' suspicions as utterly beneath her notice, and shut herself up in silence and reserve.

There were not wanting those who noticed this, and unhappily put the worst construction upon it. Even Sister Rachel remarked it, and remembered with a pang Charlotte's uncalled for violence in preventing Lydia approaching her bed, and her admission that she had never asked her what she wanted, or offered to fetch it for her. At the time she had set this down to Charlotte's hastiness, but now a painful suspicion crept into her mind that perhaps all was not well with the girl they had so loved and trusted; for Charlotte, in spite of her occasional ebullitions of impatience, was a general favourite, and really respected in the school. Why such violence? why such temper? thought Sister Rachel, and she mentioned the matter to Sister Mabel.

The latter was struck. She would not for an instant believe that Charlotte had taken the sixpence before Lydia appeared at the dormitory door, but she did think that she might have removed it afterwards out of spite, and that then her pride would not allow her to confess it. The idea that Charlotte, hitherto so truthful, had told a lie, was very distressing to her; but after all—so she reminded Sister Rachel—these were but vague suspicions; there was no proof, the matter had better rest. So rest it did, but Lydia avoided Charlotte, and Charlotte ignored Lydia.

It was a close thundery evening, about a week after this, too hot to play. The doors were all open, and the children sat round Sister Rachel, who had just appeared from St. Joseph's, and who they arranged should read them a story while they did their "recreation work." All sorts of pretty little works were in progress, for the August visiting day was near at hand, and most of the children liked to have some little gift in readiness for the friends who should visit them. They were all very quiet; not much else was to be heard but Sister Rachel's voice as she read them the required tale, and the splashing of the rain without.

Suddenly Lydia uttered an exclamation and made a snatch at Charlotte's work-box. Charlotte was only just in time to prevent its capture. "How dare you! what are you about, Lydia?" she exclaimed indignantly.

"What can you possibly be about?" said everybody else in chorus.

"My dear Lydia," said Sister Rachel, "what extraordinary manners!"

"I saw it, I saw it," exclaimed the child excitedly, "I saw it when Charlotte took out that piece of green silk, I saw it there under the silk-winders! Sister, Sister, make her give it up!"

"Give up what, child," said the Sister, "what have you seen?"

"My sixpence, oh, my sixpence," was the unexpected reply.

"Lydia, it is a lie," replied Charlotte firmly, her cheeks flushing, her bright hazel eyes sparkling with anger.

All her suspicions recurred to Sister Rachel. "You can have no objection, Charlotte," she said coldly, "to turn out your work-box, and show Lydia she is mistaken."

"I shall do no such thing," said Charlotte. "She knows what she says is an untruth. I will not bear these suspicions. I will not submit to them. She shall take my word, it is good enough for her betters."

"It is not good enough for me," said Sister Rachel, her round, good-natured face looking more displeased than the children had ever before remembered to have seen it. "I must insist on your giving up your work-box to me."

Charlotte looked up at the Sister defiantly. She saw she also suspected her, and losing all control over herself, folded her arms over her box exclaiming, "I will give it up to no one but Sister Mabel."

The children sat aghast at this open defiance of Sister Rachel's authority. She however, quietly wrote a few lines in pencil to Sister Mabel requesting her immediate presence in the schoolroom, and having despatched Carrie with the note through the cloisters to the Sisters' house, took up a doll's frock she was making and worked in silence. Not a word was spoken. The children turned anxious glances from time to time to the door watching for the Sister Superior's approach, and several hearts beat fast with fear lest some storm was about to obscure their sunshine within, as the natural tempest had made everything gloomy without.

At least twenty minutes elapsed—twenty minutes of silent suspense that seemed to stretch themselves into hours—before Sister Mabel accompanied by Carrie entered the room. All the children rose, and Sister Rachel very quietly and gently stated to the Sister Superior all that had occurred.

"Give me the work-box," said Sister Mabel, looking steadily but sadly at Charlotte. The latter met her glance with one as firm, and stepping up to the rostrum laid the box upon it. Sister Mabel began slowly to empty it of its contents, and amidst dead silence laid each article upon the rostrum. At length a piece of

narrow red ribbon appeared, at sight of which a smothered exclamation broke from several of the children. Charlotte turned pale, and Lydia clasping her hands exclaimed, hardly above her breath, "That is it, that is my ribbon, Sister, but oh, where is my sixpence?"

The ribbon had been cut, there was no sixpence.

"There is no sixpence whatever in the box," said Sister Mabel.

"I thought, Lydia, that you told Sister Rachel you had seen it."

"I saw the ribbon, Sister, and I knew it was mine, and I thought of course, the sixpence was on it. Oh, where can it be! oh, Sister, do ask her to give me back my sixpence." The recovery of Mark's keepsake was now the only thought in Lydia's mind.

"How do you know this ribbon is yours, Lydia?"

"Because, Sister, it was Carrie's, she gave it me, nobody else had a piece like it."

"Should you know the ribbon again, Carrie?"

"Yes, Sister."

"How?"

"It was too short, and I let a piece in. If it is Lydia's ribbon it has been joined. I joined it myself, Sister."

The Sisters looked at the ribbon. It had been joined.

"Take it in your hand, Carrie," said Sister Mabel, "and say if this is your work."

Carrie came forward and examined it. "It is, it is," she almost moaned, and burst into tears. Nor was she alone in her agitation. Every child who loved the sprightly warm-hearted Charlotte—and there were many—wept over her fall. So did Sister Rachel, and even Sister Mabel's firmness for a moment forsook her. As to Charlotte, she looked from one to the other quite scared, and stunned, and then sank down on a form and covered her face with her pinafore.

"This matter must not rest here," said Sister Mabel after a pause. "So serious an offence in one who was almost a monitor, must be laid before the Chaplain. Have you anything to say, Charlotte? any explanation to make?"

Charlotte looked up, her face as flushed now, as it had before been pale. "If you do not believe my word, Sister, it is no use my saying anything," she answered sullenly.

"Then you had better go first to the chapel and then to bed," said the Sister, and Charlotte rising haughtily made her curtsy to Sister Mabel and left the room, shutting the door so loudly behind her, that the noise almost amounted to a slam.

With a few words of sorrowful warning to the children Sister Mabel dismissed them. It was not yet bed-time, and they returned

to their places and recreation work, but with what changed feelings. They sat silent, sad, and awe-struck.

"Let no girl boast herself against her companion," had been Sister Mabel's last words, "but do each of you remember the Apostle's caution, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'"

Of all who grieved for Charlotte, Caroline, Miriam, and Rose seemed the most distressed. That she would on the morrow lose her medal, there could be no doubt, and Rose was provoked that Lydia seemed to have no thought for Charlotte's disgrace, or for anything but the recovery of her sixpence. This however, seemed as distant as ever, for Charlotte either could not, or would not, say what had become of it.

The next day when all the children were in their places for afternoon work, Mr. Neville entered the schoolroom. It was the first time he had done so since Lydia had been received at St. Mary's, and she now began to realise that the affair of her sixpence had brought sorrow to others beside herself.

For the first time she forgot her own loss in consternation at Charlotte's disgrace, and listened with breathless anxiety to Mr. Neville's and Sister Mabel's investigation of the case. They were very patient and careful, but the evidence was strong against Charlotte, and her defiant manner, and haughty reserve, strengthened it greatly. Not a doubt existed in the mind of any present that she had taken the sixpence either from dishonesty or spite, but this conviction did but add to the sorrow which prevailed, when at Mr. Neville's bidding, she walked proudly up to the rostrum and laid her medal and ribbon upon it. The monitors were all crying bitterly, Charlotte had been almost one of them, and they loved her dearly.

Lydia looked from one to the other in dismay, and shrank back, fearing lest she should be looked on with dislike as the cause of all this trouble. Mr. Neville addressed the little flock before he left them. He spoke of the beginnings of sins, the little deceits, and little dishonesties, which lead to lying and stealing, the little peevishnesses and indulged spites, which end in ungovernable pride and temper, the little self-excused sins which unchecked may develope into wickedness at which the heart would sink with dismay could they but be foreseen. Then he touched on the evidence of true sorrow—the brave determination to rise like St. Peter from the fall, to bear the humiliation, to submit lovingly to the punishment, to mark the beginnings of the evil, and so by God's grace to turn the fall into a means, not only of rising again, but of rising higher in the inner life than before.

"But remember, my children," he said in conclusion, "before all this can be, there must be the humble sorrowful confession, 'I have sinned before the LORD:' till that confession has been breathed from the heart there cannot be the precious words, 'The LORD also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.' Till pride has been subdued, and we can see our sin as it really is, and confess it without a single excuse, without laying blame on any other, till then, my children, there can be no repentance, and therefore no forgiveness, no rising again, but a falling lower and lower, a deadening of the heart, a daily resistance of the loving Spirit of God, till—what?—till such dreadful words as these may be spoken of the obstinate soul, 'Let her alone.' And how shall we obtain the softened penitent heart?" he added, after a slight pause, "by not waiting till we feel sorry, but by saying at once and over and over again, 'LORD, help me.'"

He turned as he spoke and looked at Charlotte, but she might have been a stone for any emotion or compunction expressed in her countenance. Sister Mabel sighed heavily in disappointment and grief, and on the Chaplain's withdrawal the children took up their work in silence; but there were several whose eyes were dim with tears. Rose's tears fell fast upon her work, and Caroline could scarcely restrain her sobs.

It was a weary afternoon, and there was something very depressing, so felt even the most thoughtless child, in the sort of stern industry with which Charlotte plied her needle, and the hard defiant expression on her face.

A long July afternoon. Every one was glad when it was over. Every one was glad when tea was ended, and they could turn out into the playground and get rid of their depression. It was curious to watch the demeanour of the girls towards Charlotte. Those who had been her favourite companions kept shyly out of her way; the ne'er-do-weels took a miserable petty pleasure apparently, in showing her despicable little impertinences, others quietly ignored her, whilst Lydia watched her with a sort of pitying remorse, and Carrie and Rose took every opportunity of showing her some little act of thoughtful kindness with almost reverent gentleness.

The hearts of these two girls yearned over their companion. They did not doubt her sin, but they longed for her repentance. Rose pondered how she could without seeming to "set herself up," tell her how similar words of Mr. Neville's in the time of her own distress had been words of blessing and happiness to her, how she might cheer her as she had cheered Sanna. But then there was this great obstacle in the way—Charlotte would neither admit her

sin, or enter into any explanation, or receive any sympathy. What could be done?

The same question perplexed Carrie, and Sister Mabel was even now pondering it in her private room. Rose could arrive at no solution of the difficulty, and too much out of spirits to play, too preoccupied to read, she took her work to the tree at the end of the playground, and gave herself up to her own undisturbed reflections.

Meantime poor little Lydia had skulked about, feeling that every one looked upon her as in some way or other the cause of Charlotte's disgrace. She was very unhappy. The loss of Mark's keepsake was still grievous to her, and an undefined sense of wrong-doing on her own part oppressed her. She could not define her feelings, and she longed for some one to explain them for her. Whilst she lingered sadly by the schoolroom door, Sister Mabel came out of her room, and observing the child's melancholy, beckoned her to her.

"I am sorry, Lydia, your sixpence has not been found," she said gravely.

"It's not that, Sister," said the little girl looking down; and the tears gathered fast in her eyes.

"What then, my child?" asked the Sister, drawing her to her. And Lydia falteringly and timidly tried to explain the undefined misgiving that oppressed her. She did not express herself very clearly, but Sister Mabel understood what she would say.

"You mean, my love, that you feel you have not been guiltless in this matter, because of your disobedience in wilfully breaking a known rule, on that unhappy morning?"

"Yes, Sister."

"Well then, my child, take this loss of your brother's little gift, and any unpleasantnesses from your companions, as a very just punishment, and determine to bear both patiently and gently without another word. Whenever an uncomfortable feeling against your companions, or Charlotte, rises in your mind, stop it by saying to yourself, 'I have deserved it.' That is your best way now of showing you are sorry for your share in the misdoing of that day."

"Sister, dear," said the little girl looking up wistfully in Sister Mabel's face, "you don't know how very naughty I was that morning: much naughtier than anybody knows. The beginning of it all was, that I didn't choose to get up when Sister Rachel called us, though I was awake, and so I had to dress in a great hurry, and that made me forget my sixpence: and then I was

thinking of it all prayer time, and never said any prayers at all: and that's not all," here her tears fell fast, "for I wouldn't ask Sister Ruth to let me get it, because I knew she'd say it was my own fault it was there, and so it must stay there; so I was deceitful, Sister, too, for I ran out of the class when she wasn't looking, and when I went to the dormitory I knew it was forbidden; and Charlotte was quite right in stopping me, as she was dormitory girl, and I pushed her, Sister, I did indeed, and was in a passion with her, though she was quite right. So I'm much worse than Charlotte, O, I am so sorry, so sorry."

This speech was broken by many sobs, and at its conclusion the little girl dropped on her knees, and hid her face in the Sister's lap.

Sister Mabel had been greatly depressed that day. She had had such confidence in Charlotte's truth and high principle that her fall was an untold grief to her. She felt weary with disappointment and discouragement, but now the artless confession of this little child brought comfort to her.

"My child," she said, "if you have indeed learned to trace faults to their beginnings, and make your falls an occasion of rising again, you have found out the true secret of correcting yourself, and of growing stronger in well-doing. Now ask for grace to be able to overcome temptations to disobedience another time, and let the remembrance of your present sorrow make you determine that you will, by God's help, rather endure any inconvenience or disappointment than wilfully disobey those whom He has set over you, or be guilty of the very smallest act of deceit."

She raised the little head and kissed it, and then taking the child's hand, knelt down with her, and offered with and for her, the prayer she had recommended; after which she went about the duties of her vocation, praying all the time in her heart for the children committed to her charge; whilst Lydia returned to the playground, so relieved and comforted by her confession that she felt as if a dark cloud had passed away, and the sun had shone out once more; still thinking regretfully of Mark's keepsake, but content to acquiesce in the loss of it as a punishment for her fault, and anxious to prove by gentleness and kindness to Charlotte that she considered herself, as she expressed it, "much worse than her."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MONITORS.

BUT Charlotte was not in the playground. Her pride had hitherto kept her up, and restrained all expression of feeling. Not for worlds would she have allowed any of her companions to guess how deeply she felt the loss of her position. Bent on showing that she did not care if all the world thought her guilty, as long as her own conscience acquitted her, she braved it out as long as any one witness was in sight, but when, after tea the schoolroom was deserted, some of the girls betaking themselves to their duties, some to their sports, the realisation of that which had come upon her, passed over her like a wave, and she sank beneath it.

At first she sat still with her head bowed down on the desk before her whilst all that she had lost, respect, position, love, confidence, passed before her. Then as a storm of passionate grief rose within her, and her hysterical weeping became beyond control, she rushed away to seek some quiet place in which to weep alone. The chapel suggested itself as the most secluded spot. No sound would be heard from it, and no one at that hour was likely to go to it. She closed the door carefully behind her, and drew across it the heavy curtain generally used instead, and feeling herself secure from interruption for a good two hours at least, she gave herself up to unrestrained sorrow. It was a violent angry sorrow, however. She raged against the Sisters for doubting her, against the Chaplain for punishing her, against her companions for condemning her, and principally against Lydia as the cause of all her affliction. She did not hear the door open and shut again softly, or the curtain drawn aside and then replaced, or the quiet footfall pausing irresolutely at the entrance, and then coming softly towards her; she did not know that any one had entered the chapel till an arm was passed gently round her waist, and looking up, she saw Carrie's gentle face bending over her, and felt her tears falling on her brow. Her first impulse was to push her angrily away, but her heart smote her as soon as she had done so, and yearning now for sympathy, she threw her arms round her friend's neck, and sobbed, but much more gently, on her bosom.

"Let us come into the sacristy and talk," whispered Carrie, when they had wept together awhile in silence. Charlotte rose and followed. Carrie placed a small low form in such a position that seated on it the girls had a full view of the altar, and then

by way of leading Charlotte to speak of her trouble she began gently and caressingly, "I wish you would not cry so bitterly, Charlotte dear, I wish you would think of what Mr. Neville said about—"

"I'm not likely to forget anything that Mr. Neville said to-day," interrupted Charlotte snappishly.

Carrie was disconcerted. "But Charlotte, dear, why not act upon it then?" she said after a pause.

"Upon what?" asked Charlotte almost fiercely.

"Upon what he said about rising again from a fall, asking for help, and confessing the fault, and making all the reparation in one's power."

"Confessing a fault I have never committed," said Charlotte, laughing bitterly. "Do you mean to say that you, even you, Carrie, believe that I have taken this miserable sixpence, that I, Charlotte Armstrong, am a thief and a liar?" She rose as she spoke and her eyes flashed.

Carrie paused again before she answered. "We none of us I am sure suspect you of being a thief, Charlotte, I know I do not, I am sure the Sisters do not; what we think is, that you hid away the sixpence to vex Lydia, and then were ashamed to own it."

"I have told lies so often that of course you are quite right to suppose so," replied Charlotte very quietly, but with a face white with anger. "I have deceived Sister Mabel so often that she was right in making Mr. Neville believe me a liar; I have denied my faults so often that Sister Rachel was quite right in saying my word was not good enough for her."

"O, Charlotte, Charlotte," said Carrie rising, "I cannot stay if you talk like that. How could we all help believing you had done this when everything seemed so plain against you?"

"Because of my word," replied Charlotte proudly; "Sister Mabel herself admitted that I had never deceived her since I have been in the house. And yet in spite of that she believes this of me in a moment. And why? because this mischievous foolish Lydia happens to be her favourite."

"Oh, Charlotte, no," exclaimed Carrie in a tone of great distress; "you do not mean that—you do not even think it. You are angry now and don't know what you say. But when you come to think quietly over all the years you have been here you will be grieved to think you could ever have accused Sister Mabel of having favourites, and making distinctions."

Charlotte's heart did secretly smite her even then, for Sister Mabel's strict justice and impartiality were so recognised in the school that it was one main cause of the strong love she inspired

in some, the unbounded confidence with which she was regarded by all. None had felt this more than Charlotte herself, and her eyes fell now before Carrie's earnest gaze, in shame that she had so spoken.

"Why does she believe me a liar now, when I have never told one falsehood since I have been here?" she said at length.

"Because," replied Carrie, "you were so full of pride and anger that you seemed ready to say anything. Because there is always a first fault, I suppose, in every one—a first lie—a first theft, in those who have been truthful and honest."

"People don't turn all at once into thieves and liars; I have heard Sister Mabel say that myself," returned Charlotte proudly.

"No, the secret little sins of the heart that no one knows anything about make liars and thieves of those who have seemed honest and true. That is what the Father spoke so earnestly about to-day."

Charlotte scowled.

"Besides," continued Carrie, "people may sometimes fall suddenly, Mr. Neville said that in his sermon about St. Peter. We cannot suppose he had ever told a falsehood before, or used swearing before, yet 'he began to curse and swear, saying, I know not this Man of whom ye speak.' He fell because he was proud of his strength; but Charlotte, dear," she added hastily as she saw her companion about to speak, "as it was his first great sin, so it was his last; O do think of that. He fell almost to Judas, he rose the prince of the apostles. These are not my words, you know, Charlotte, they are the Father's. Oh, Charlotte, dear Charlotte, do, do think of what he said to you to-day, oh, do act upon it. Say, 'LORD, help me.'"

Charlotte threw her arms round her companion, and her tears flowed fast but gently. "I have been hard and proud, I have behaved ill to every one," she said at last. "But, Carrie, you will believe me, I know, when I say now to you, that indeed I have not taken this sixpence, and I do not know what has become of it. Do you believe me, Carrie?" she said humbly and imploringly, and looking wistfully in Carrie's face.

"I do," said Carrie heartily. Charlotte heaved a sigh of relief, and the two girls kissing each other fondly, sat down again hand in hand upon the form. And Carrie did believe her, and a weight of care seemed gone in a moment from both. But presently Charlotte's present position, and the difficulty of establishing her innocence occurred to them. They talked earnestly over this matter, but there seemed no way out of this difficulty; and Charlotte began murmuring despairingly; "Ah, I'm ruined now in the school, I

shall never rise now ; and so near too as I was to getting the blue ribbon. I made sure I should have it this September."

There was something in this speech which jarred on Caroline. She sat for a few moments stroking Charlotte's hand, and arranging her ideas, then she said, "I wish, Charlotte, you would not talk of getting the blue ribbon as if it was only a common prize such as we might get for writing or needlework."

"Of course I know it's higher than that, that's why I want it so," said Charlotte.

"Yes, but I'm sure Sister Mabel does not consider it a prize at all. I mean," said Carrie, trying to get her thoughts into shape, "I am sure she and Mr. Neville consider it more a token of agreement given to those who they think are really wishing to imitate our Lord's Blessed Mother."

"I say again, that's why I want it," replied Charlotte.

"But, Charlotte dear," said Carrie, "are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure," answered Charlotte confidently.

"But do think, dear, whether it was like our dear Lady being so cross to poor Lydia, and so rude to Sister Rachel, and so proud to Sister Mabel, and even to Mr. Neville."

Charlotte was struck. She had been so taken up with her wrongs, as she considered them, that she had spared no thoughts as yet for her own faults. Slowly they now began to rise before her; still she would not altogether relinquish her defence, or rather the balancing of her shortcomings against her neighbours. "Lydia behaved very ill about coming into the dormitory. She knew she'd no business to, and she pushed me quite in a temper," she said; but the charge was made rather hesitatingly.

"But you might have asked what she wanted, and got it for her. There's no rule against coming as far as the dormitory door."

"She was in such a hurry," said Charlotte.

"And you were so hasty, eh, dear?"

Charlotte almost smiled, then sighed and said, "Sister Rachel had no business to say my word was not good enough for her."

"Sister Rachel only asked you to satisfy Lydia that her sixpence was not in your box, and you refused; you cannot justify that."

"Lydia has made herself quite ridiculous about this trumpery sixpence."

"Oh, Charlotte, you know why she treasured it so, it was a keepsake from her only brother whom she loves so much, and who is father and mother and everything, to her."

"She'd no business to snatch at my box when there was nothing of hers there."

"The ribbon was there, Charlotte."

Charlotte started. "So it was. Oh, Carrie, we have never thought of that. How could it have got there?"

But though Charlotte might not have thought much of this point in her troubles, Carrie had thought of it a great deal, and it puzzled her exceedingly. "Some one must have put it there," she murmured half to herself.

"Oh, how wicked, how wicked some one must have been!" exclaimed Charlotte.

"It might not have been done on purpose," suggested Carrie catching at hope. "Some one might have found the ribbon lying about, and have put it into the first box that stood open."

Charlotte considered. "That could hardly be, my box was locked. I always keep it locked."

"You might have left the key in the lock, and some one tidying up the room may have turned the key and put the ribbon in."

Charlotte did not think it very likely. She was very particular about her things. Her work-box was always in exquisite order, and no one would have ventured such an outrage upon it as to put in a piece of chance rubbish off the floor. All this she thought, and some of it she said. And then it suddenly occurred to them both that the ribbon was not found at the top of the box, but underneath at the very bottom.

"I am afraid there has been some foul play," said Carrie uneasily, "but, Charlotte dear, you see, do you not, how very strong the evidence seemed against you? you will not any longer think hardly of Sister Mabel or of the Father, or any of us, for supposing that if the ribbon was at the bottom of your box, and the box locked, that you must have put it in there yourself?"

"No indeed," sighed Charlotte.

"Or hardly of poor Lydia, who caught sight of her ribbon in your box, and was naturally eager to get it?"

"No," Charlotte sighed again. "But, oh, Carrie, what can I do to clear myself? what shall I do? what can I do?"

This was a question that fairly baffled Carrie, she was as much puzzled as Charlotte. "I'll tell you what, Charlotte dear, I think you'd better do," she said after some moments' consideration: "In the first place if I was you, I'd pray about it quite humbly and gently, confessing all the time it served me quite right; then I'd go to Sister Mabel very respectfully, and say how sorry I was for my temper, and just tell her simply and plainly that you haven't touched the sixpence."

"That would be no use, she wouldn't believe me," interrupted Charlotte.

"I think she would if you spoke to her properly," said Carrie.

Charlotte shook her head.

"Well then," continued Carrie, "if you like I'll speak to her first, and I'll ask her if we monitors may see what we can do to clear up this mystery, only will you wait patiently, and—and humbly, dear Charlotte? for indeed, dear, you have been naughty, very naughty, if you'd only think so."

"Oh, I do, I do," exclaimed Charlotte, again throwing her arms round Carrie. "Carrie, you've done me so much good, I feel so much happier. I won't be proud any longer—I mean I'll try not. I know, I feel, I have behaved ill, and I will tell Sister Mabel so, and I will try to bear everything humbly and patiently, I will indeed."

This was a result beyond Carrie's brightest hopes. She returned Charlotte's embrace warmly, and at that instant the chapel bell began to ring.

Carrie started up. "Oh, Charlotte, what a time we've been! I ought to be ringing the bell, I'm afraid it's late. I wonder who's doing it for me."

Sister Rachel was; and she lifted her eyebrows in surprise as Carrie passed out. "I am so sorry, Sister, I am late," she said. "I was talking to Charlotte in the sacristy, and didn't watch the time."

"Well, run and report yourself to Sister Mabel then," said the Sister. "She thinks you're lost."

Carrie hastened to do so, and having reported herself, said eagerly, "May I come to you after prayers, Sister, and tell you what has passed between Charlotte and me?"

Sister Mabel gave her leave, and whilst the rest of the girls were going to bed the young monitor made her full report to her superior, urging with affectionate vehemence her belief in Charlotte's innocence. She was, however, surprised, and almost vexed, to find that the Sister was by no means convinced by her arguments.

"My dear child," said Sister Mabel, "you must remember that we have only Charlotte's word against some very startling facts;" and she recapitulated the evidence against her.

Carrie sighed, and there was a pause. "Sister, may I talk this over with the monitors to-morrow, alone in the garden after school?" she asked, "and will you give us authority to do all we can to find out whether any one put that ribbon into Charlotte's box?"

"I cannot think any girl in the school could have done so very wicked a thing," replied the Sister, "but I give you free leave to do all you can to clear up what you suppose a mystery."

Carrie retired quite satisfied, and the next morning the monitors adjourned to the garden, and then Carrie laid the case before them.

They all, but especially Miriam, caught eagerly at the belief of Charlotte's innocence. At their request Carrie summoned her to join them.

"Charlotte," said Miriam going up to her and taking both her hands, "we are all willing to believe that you have been quite true, and we will do all we can to prove your innocence to Sister Mabel and the Father."

Charlotte looked up humbly and gratefully, but did not speak.

"At the same time, Charlotte," said downright Mary Anne Foster, "we must tell you that you have behaved abominably to the Sisters, but especially to Sister Rachel."

"She owns she has," said Carrie, eagerly.

"Then she must say she's sorry," said Mary Anne, decidedly.

"She will, I am sure," said Carrie, anxiously.

"I will, indeed," said Charlotte, "I will go to Sister Mabel now, directly, and I will beg Sister Rachel's pardon as soon as she comes in this evening."

"But I don't think that will do at all," said Mary Anne, "you misbehaved yourself before all the girls, so your apology ought to be before them all too."

"How do you mean?" asked Charlotte.

"Why, I mean that before work this afternoon, when we are all in class, you ought to get up, and before every one tell Sister Mabel you're ashamed of yourself."

"What, before Isabella, and Jemima, and the little ones?" exclaimed Charlotte, in dismay; and Miriam said, "Oh, Mary Anne, you are too hard."

"Why not?" said Mary Anne, replying to Charlotte, "Isabella, and Jemima, and the little ones were by when you declared to Sister Rachel that you would not obey her, they were by when you poked insolently to Sister Mabel, and slammed the door after you, so why shouldn't they be by when you own you're ashamed of yourself?"

"But it would be such dreadful shame," pleaded Miriam, who knew what her own sensations would be were such an ordeal proposed to her. "And some of the girls would jeer afterwards, I know they would, and there are one or two that would be glad to see Charlotte so humbled, and I see no call for her to let herself down like that. Let her beg Sister Mabel's forgiveness in private, and Sister Mabel will herself tell the girls she has done so, and then she will only have half the shame."

"Yes, yes, that will be much the best way," said gentle peace-loving Martha, and Charlotte breathed more freely.

But Mary Anne answered quite indignantly, "Half the shame!

why should she have only half the shame? I'm sure the Father would not call that making reparation."

"You forget Charlotte was almost a monitor," replied Miriam, "so it would never do for her to let herself down before the younger girls."

"Hasn't she already 'let herself down before them?'" said Mary Anne; "I don't see she can let herself down much lower."

It was a satisfactory proof that Charlotte had begun to view her conduct in its true light, that she felt no resentment whatever at Mary Anne's plain speaking. "I will do whatever Carrie thinks best," she said; and they all looked towards Carrie.

"Then, Charlotte dear," said she, colouring deeply as she spoke, "I advise you the same as Mary Anne; I think she is quite right. All that have seen you do wrong, should see you do right. I'm sure we oughtn't to shirk what's painful and humbling when we want to prove that we are really sorry."

A pause ensued. Charlotte had expressed her willingness to abide by Carrie's decision, but it had been with a hope that she would have suggested some middle course. The idea of a public apology was tremendous to her.

Miriam spoke first. "Well, I don't see any occasion for her to speak before any one but the Sisters."

"I think Carrie's right," said Martha, gently.

"I think too," said Carrie, "that Charlotte ought to tell Lydia she's sorry for having been so out of temper with her."

But here the three other monitors, speaking together, declared that that was wholly unnecessary. Lydia had also misbehaved, and the idea of Charlotte apologising to her was preposterous. But when Carrie urged a variety of excuses for Lydia, and said how Charlotte's temper had been the very thing likely to weaken the monitors' authority, Martha again sided with her, and even Mary Anne was half convinced.

Emboldened by this, Carrie brought forward her last argument. "You see, I think that Charlotte is bound to humble herself as much as she can, for the very reason that she was nearly a monitor. A fault in a monitor must be double a fault in one of the little ones; so if any one of the girls would have had to apologise publicly for misconduct, or beg pardon of any one she had been unkind to, I think a monitor is bound to do so twice as much, because her fault is twice as great; she brings great scandal on her position, and the only way of taking away the scandal, would be by showing she was sorry for it."

"To be sure, to be sure," said Mary Anne, "I don't see how we could, with any conscience, wear blue ribbons else."

he blue ribbons would be quite a mockery," replied Carrie, earnestly. "They are given to us on the understanding that to do our best to imitate our Blessed Lady; and if we wear only as something that sticks us up above others, they are than nothing. And if because we wear our Lady's medal not to humble ourselves when we have been most unlike; when we have been unkind to a companion, we are not to our Blessed LORD, and make it up directly before we say our s, why, I think the sooner we give up our ribbons and the better."

"Well, that's very true," said Mary Anne, "and you must own, Charlotte, that you haven't been much like Blessed Mary, for we fancy her bouncing about in a passion."

And though, Charlotte, dear," broke in Martha, "you haven't had to lose your medal for what the Father thinks you've you have deserved to lose it, haven't you, for being so angry with me? so everything comes right in the end, doesn't it?" At this juncture the dinner-bell rang. The subject was not repeated afterwards; so when the work classes assembled in the afternoon the monitors were quite ignorant of what Charlotte intended

work was handed round, the necessary directions given; and when all was quiet, a teacher, according to custom, began to read aloud. But Charlotte had made no sign. "She does not to do it," thought Caroline with a sigh.

The first hour of work had passed away. Charlotte had all that time been steadily over her work, but her cheeks were crimson and her hands trembling. Presently the reader paused, another was to take her place, and in this interval Sister Louisa perambulated the classes, inspecting the work. When this inspection was finished, and the new reader could begin, Charlotte rose and advanced to the rostrum. Sister Mabel looked up surprised.

"If you please, Sister, may I say something?" said she, her hands beating so fast she could scarcely speak.

"Certainly," replied the Sister gravely.

Charlotte half turned towards her companions, but her eyes were fixed on the floor. She put her hand upon her heart to still its beating; then she said as audibly as she could, "I humbly beg pardon, Sister, for having spoken so improperly to you, and for being so ill yesterday and the day before, and I am very sorry that I behaved so disrespectfully to Sister Rachel."

Sister Mabel listened with evident satisfaction, but she seemed to want to say something more. "Yes?" she said inquiringly, when Charlotte paused. "Is that all?" she added, as the girl did not speak.

"Sister, I did not take Lydia's sixpence, and do not know how the ribbon came in my box; but I know I deserved to lose my medal for my bad conduct."

Mary Anne here rose in her place. "If you please, Sister," she said, "we monitors are quite sure Charlotte is speaking the truth. It's all a puzzle at present, which we'll try and find out. Any how she owns she deserves to lose her medal."

Bluntly as Mary Anne spoke, Charlotte felt grateful to her. Sister Mabel did not immediately answer. She was relieved, greatly relieved, as to Charlotte, but the idea that any child at St. Mary's could be found so lost to all better feelings as to wilfully plan a companion's disgrace, was dreadful to think of; and if Charlotte was really innocent, how otherwise could the presence of the ribbon in her work-box be accounted for?

Charlotte still stood with her head bent down, and the Sister roused herself to answer.

"I am very thankful, Charlotte," she said, gravely, "that you feel that your conduct has been very improper. I forgive you, and so, I am sure, will Sister Rachel. As to this affair of the sixpence, it seems indeed, as Mary Anne says, a puzzle. You have never yet told me a falsehood, my dear child, therefore I am bound to believe your assurance now. I do believe it."

Charlotte looked up for one moment with a glance of such humble gratitude, that it was impossible to doubt her truth.

"Still," continued Sister Mabel, "though I will state my belief to the Reverend Father, I cannot promise you your medal back again. You own yourself, that by your temper, disobedience, and, I must say, insolence, you have forfeited it."

Charlotte's head drooped again.

"Have you anything else you want to say?" asked the Sister, seeing she did not move.

"Yes, if you please, Sister," answered Charlotte, choking back the sobs that were rising within her, "I want to beg Lydia's pardon too, for having been so very cross to her."

Sister Mabel was greatly pleased, for she quite appreciated this effort of humility. "I think Lydia will soon grant that," she said, smiling. But the words had hardly escaped her lips, before the little girl had started from her place and thrown herself into Charlotte's arms.

"O, Charlotte, dear, dear Charlotte," she exclaimed, "it was all my fault; oh, I am so sorry, so very sorry, it's all through me you've lost your medal. Oh, do forgive me, I am so very sorry."

Charlotte, greatly moved, hugged her little companion closely to her, and they both sobbed aloud.

"Stay, my dear," said the Sister to Lydia, "it was not all your fault. You and Charlotte may share the blame between you, but Charlotte will know and feel that she has brought this trouble on herself. 'The beginning of strife,' the Bible says, 'is like the letting out of water,' and so are the beginnings of pride and anger. The finding out of a besetting sin is one step, and the principal step towards correcting it, and confessing it is the second. Charlotte has taken both these, and she must now ask for grace to go on to the 'forsaking it.'"

Charlotte and Lydia exchanged one long lingering kiss of forgiveness and love, curtsied to the Sister, and returned to their places; the former with an aching head and dim eyes, but a wonderfully lightened heart; the latter full to overflowing with an almost passionate love to the girl she thought she had so greatly injured, and who, as she felt, had behaved so generously to her.

When work was over, she crept to her side, covering her with kisses, and entreating her forgiveness for that unfortunate push which was still burdensome to her memory, and the whole of that evening she followed her like her shadow, studying by what little services she could offer some reparation for the injury she still believed she had inflicted on her. While Charlotte, softened and touched by her little companion's affection, and the bright smiles and loving words with which she was greeted by her former companions and friends, and cheered by Sister Mabel's approving look, and Sister Rachel's hearty kiss, felt happier than she could have believed possible under her loss of position and voluntary humiliation.

But the monitors were not idle that evening. Possessing themselves of the 'class bell,' they rang the whole orphanage together in the playground, when Mary Anne opened the matter thus:

"Now look here, girls, we must all of us clear up this affair of the sixpence. We all heard Charlotte say to-day, quietly and reasonably, that she didn't touch it, and there's not one of us that doubts her word."

"How is it she's lost her ribbon, then?" said one of the girls.

"Because," replied Caroline, answering quickly, "it's one thing when a person says they haven't done a thing in the sulks or a passion, and quite another thing when they speak quietly and respectfully, as Charlotte did this afternoon. No one, who knows Charlotte, could doubt she was speaking the truth this afternoon."

"And Charlotte has never told a falsehood since she has been here," said Miriam.

"None that has been found out, you mean," said a voice in the back rows of the children.

Miriam whirled round towards it. "Isabella, stand a little forward," said she to the speaker. Isabella looked slightly disconcerted, but complied. "Did you clear up the schoolroom the day before yesterday?"

"No."

"Who did then?"

"It was I, Miriam," said a gentle voice, and the blue-eyed Sanna crept under the elbows of some taller girls in front, and stood before Miriam.

"Oh, you, was it?" said Mary Anne, "then perhaps we shall see daylight at last. Now look here, dear, did you pick up any rubbish off the floor, and did you put anything into any one's work-box?"

"No indeed," replied Sanna, "I picked up nothing; I swept the rubbish into my dustpan, and threw it into the dusthole."

The question was then put by Carrie to all the children, collectively and individually, as to whether any of them had put any stray piece of ribbon into any one's box. To which one and all returned a direct negative.

"Mind," said Miriam, "we don't mean put this particular piece of ribbon on purpose into Charlotte's box, we don't believe any girl at St. Mary's could do such a horrible thing; if we did—" here Miriam's handsome face coloured crimson, and her dark eyes flashed at the very idea of such infamy; "If we found her out, we'd have her up before the Father with our own hands," said Mary Anne, finishing the sentence in her loud, decided voice.

"What we mean," said Carrie, gently but very earnestly, "is, that some one of you may, without noticing it, without thinking of it, have seen a piece of ribbon lying about, and have put it into the first box that stood by. Do think, dears, do try to remember. The ribbon could not have got into Charlotte's box without hands."

"Carrie," said a sensible looking girl standing near her, "isn't it just possible that Charlotte may have put it in herself that way? you know it was in so tidily, folded away under her silk-winders."

"Let's ask," said a general chorus, and a messenger was despatched for Charlotte, who was at the other end of the playground. She came directly, accompanied by Lydia, who never left her. All her former sprightly and rather dictatorial manner was gone. She spoke sadly, and moved slowly, but there was nothing sulky or gloomy about her, and her bearing towards her companions was gentle and even grateful.

In answer to Carrie's questions, she replied that she was certain she could not have put the ribbon into her box without knowing it, and when asked "Why?" explained that she was so particular *about the contents* of the box, that she would have been sure to

have examined, or at least observed, and remembered, anything she had put into it.

Baffled on the subject of the ribbon, the monitors, with greatly diminished hopes, now tried to find out something about the sixpence, while Charlotte and Lydia once more walked off together.

On the occasion of Mr. Neville's visit to the orphanage, every girl's pocket had been turned out, and every box, &c., belonging to them, searched. But Miriam had shrewdly remarked to her fellow-monitors that as the Chaplain's visit was expected, it was not likely that the sixpence would be left in any discoverable place; their best chance of finding it would be by searching suddenly and without warning, and they had laid their plans accordingly.

"Well," said Mary Anne, "it doesn't seem there's anything to be found out about the ribbon. But there's something else we want to say; but you girls are all so huddled together;—now fall into a circle round us monitors, and then every one of you will hear what it is."

The girls fell into circle, some laughing, some grumbling, but Carrie rebuked them into silence. "It's no laughing matter, and nothing to grumble at, surely, when we're trying to clear up a great wrong. We want you all to stand in order, and take each other's hands, and not speak a word, but listen to what we've got to say. Every one join hands," she repeated, clapping her own.

"Why it's like 'drop handkerchief,'" laughed a little girl of seven years old, the youngest of the party, highly delighted.

"Just like it, Minnie," replied Miriam, "make the circle even and keep your distances just as you do in 'drop handkerchief,' and hold each other's hands fast."

She and Carrie then walked round the circle making it even, and placing the children at such distances from each other, that though firmly linked hand in hand, their clothes did not touch. When this was done Carrie raised her voice, and in a tone very unusual to her, said, "Now listen, silence! We monitors have Sister Mabel's authority for what we are going to do. Whoever resists us will be resisting Sister Mabel. We desire you then to hold each other's hands fast. Whoever lets go we will have up before Sister Mabel for deliberate disobedience. Stand steady, girls, *I am going to search your pockets.*"

Miriam's eyes were fixed on Isabella, but she only smiled, and seemed to think it as great a joke as little Minnie. Rose, however, who held Jemima with one hand, and Hetty with the other, felt a convulsive start from either. She tightened her grasp and looking at her companions saw they had both turned very pale; Jemima in particular seemed ready to faint. Mary Anne, Martha, and

Miriam watched the circle closely that the links should not be broken, and Carrie went round emptying every girl's pocket in turn. The articles turned out were of the most miscellaneous description, and in some instances provoked a good deal of laughter; but nothing suspicious appeared, not even from Isabella's. Rose watched eagerly for the contents of the pockets of her companions on either side. She was surprised to see how unconcerned they appeared when Carrie approached them, and still more so at the harmlessness of the things she turned out. "What could they have started for?" thought she, "why should they have looked so guilty?"

Every pocket had now been searched, but there was no sixpence. The monitors had only one chance more.

"Every girl stay in the playground," said Caroline in the same decided tone in which she had before spoken. "And every girl give up her keys; Miriam and I are going to search the schoolroom."

Again Miriam's eyes rested on Isabella, and again they met the same unclouded look, and again Rose felt Hetty and Jemima start as she still held their hands, and saw the pallor once more appear on their cheeks.

The circle broke up. Mary Anne and Martha remained in the playground whilst Caroline and Miriam departed on their search. A number of the girls flocked down to the further end of the ground where Charlotte and Lydia were sitting with Sister Rachel who had joined them, Sister Mabel having desired her not to interfere with the monitors' proceedings.

Isabella called to Jemima and threw a ball with all her strength. The two ran a race for it while their companions looked on and laughed. They reached it nearly together and tumbled over it and each other. "Why do you look so scared, you simpleton?" said Isabella, as they picked themselves up. "It was almost up through you. Didn't you see how Rose watched you?"

"Where is it? will they find it?" asked Jemima, her teeth chattering with fear.

"They'll be clever if they do," laughed Isabella.

"But do tell me where it is, that I may know it's safe," said Jemima, as her companion threw the ball once more.

"In my boot, you fool!" said Isabella; and then they ran a race again, and their companions, highly entertained by their antics, saw nothing but a harmless game of ball.

Hetty soon came to ask to run too, and to her Jemima said with a meaning glance, "It's all right, we'll tell you to-morrow." And Hetty's spirits rose high immediately.

Meantime Rose had communicated her suspicions to Mary Anne,

and the latter was now closely observing the three companions. "I'll speak to Jemima alone, if I have an opportunity," said she to Rose, and accordingly having watched Jemima separate herself from Isabella, she walked quickly after her and laid her hand firmly but kindly on her shoulder.

"Jemmy, I want to speak to you."

Jemmy looked surprised, but knowing the whereabouts of the sixpence, felt perfectly safe.

"Jemmy dear," said Mary Anne very kindly, "if you know anything about this unhappy sixpence, I do entreat you for poor Charlotte's sake, for your own sake, to speak out."

Jemima had not Isabella's command of countenance. She coloured furiously. "Why should you suppose I know anything about it?" she asked, roughly shaking off Mary Anne's hand. "What business have you to suspect me?"

"Why should you turn so pale when Carrie said she was going to search for it?" asked Mary Anne sternly, "if you know nothing about it, why should her looking for it disturb you?"

"It didn't—I don't care—I didn't turn pale, I don't know anything about it. It's a shame, Mary Anne, to say these things to me."

The sailor's daughter paused, and her broad honest face grew dark with anger.

"Now I'll tell you what, Jemima, it is not too late yet to confess this if you have done it, or know anything about it; but if you reject this opportunity it may be too late indeed. Remember what the Father said, 'such words as these may be spoken, *'Let her alone,'* and then it's all up, my girl, so you'd better be warned in time."

"I wish you'd let *me* alone," sobbed Jemima, nervous and excited.

"Very well," said Mary Anne quietly, "I will."

She walked off, and Jemima fairly upset roared heartily, to the great consternation of Isabella and Hetty, who yet dared not approach to ask what was the matter, for fear of exciting suspicion.

Sister Rachel, however, left her place to inquire the cause of these lamentations, and to her Jemima told a dismal tale of Mary Anne's cruel suspicions and dreadful words. Sister Rachel looked gravely at Mary Anne, who stepped forward at once, saying, "I suspected her, Sister, because she seemed so frightened when Carrie said she was going to search, and her bed is next to Lydia's. But if I have been unjust I beg her pardon; do you hear, Jemmy, if I have been unjust I heartily beg your pardon, and there's my hand, will you shake it?"

No, Jemmy would not. Most of the girls had gathered round, and sheltered by numbers, Isabella and Hetty drew near. A murmur of disapprobation arose as Jemima put Mary Anne's hand aside.

"You are showing a very unworthy spirit, Jemmy," said Sister Rachel, "Mary Anne's suspicion was very natural; and the worst of this sad mystery is, that all must be more or less suspected till it is cleared up."

The good-natured Sister turned and surveyed the young faces around her. Traces of anxiety were on all. "Now look here," said she, "I have a proposal to make. It is that each one of us should undertake to say a little prayer night and morning that the right may yet be found out. What do you say to that?"

An almost unanimous assent was the reply.

"And one thing more," she raised her voice and spoke very slowly and distinctly; "to-day is Wednesday. If before Sunday morning any one having done this wrong feels her heart touched to confess it, let her write her name on a slip of paper and drop it into the almsbox; I will ask Sister Mabel to let me keep the key, and will look into it every night before I go to bed, and if I find a name there I will call that girl to me quite privately and I will put her in a right way of making a proper confession to the Chaplain, the Sisters, and the whole orphanage."

A burst of applause followed this speech. "Thank you, Sister; that's splendid; now it's sure to come right," was repeated on all sides.

Mary Anne seemed lost in thought, and presently whispered very earnestly to Sister Rachel. The girls still hovered round, while the Sister and monitor spoke apart. "My dear," said Sister Rachel, in reply to some observation of Mary Anne's, "it came into my head that if some unhappy girl had been betrayed into telling a lie about this once, she might stick to it afterwards, not out of downright malice and wickedness, but from sheer fright, and might in her heart of hearts be longing to confess, and I thought it would be but merciful to give such a one a helping hand."

"Yes, Sister," replied Mary Anne, in rather a dissatisfied tone; "but here's another difficulty; suppose that more than one were mixed up in it, a girl might not like to confess her own share for fear of betraying her companion." Mary Anne spoke as she felt. She would unhesitatingly have given herself up to judgment had she deserved it, but would have been content to forfeit everything, love, esteem, confidence, rather than involve a companion in her trouble against her will.

Whilst debating this, Carrie and Miriam came dejectedly from

the schoolroom to give each girl back her keys, and report that they could discover nothing of the missing sixpence.

Charlotte's face was sad to see. Her false position was almost unbearable to her, and her hopes that her character would be cleared by this search had risen higher than she knew of till they sank under its failure. She felt inwardly convinced that some proof must be forthcoming to convince the Chaplain of her innocence; for the evidence was as strong against her as ever—nay stronger now—and there was only her word to weigh against it. Sister Mabel and her chosen companions might in their love and kindness take that word, but she knew that several among the children still doubted, and why not Mr. Neville?

The monitors now discussed Sister Rachel's plan, and Mary Anne's objections, and the children still hung together waiting to hear if there was anything more to be said. The moment Mary Anne turned towards them and beckoned, they once more flocked round, and the sailor's daughter spoke in a voice that might have been her father's giving orders during a gale at sea.

"Sister Rachel says I may tell you, that if more than one girl is mixed up in this, and one of the number wants to confess, but is afraid of betraying her companions, that she will undertake that no questions shall be asked of her as to who those others are—that she need not give up their names—indeed she had much better not, as the object of a confession is to save a person's own soul, and not to fasten guilt upon others."

If Isabella's face had not changed before, it did now, but she was standing behind a girl taller than herself, and it was not observed. Jemima and Hetty too flushed crimson, they were standing close together and they involuntarily caught and pressed each other's hand.

Applauding, talking, guessing and hoping, the group of children broke up, and having made up their minds that Sister Rachel would find somebody's name in the box that very evening, "for of course," said they, "no one will mind telling now," they began to play with more spirit than they had displayed before that day.

Jemima and Hetty ran towards a swing, and settled themselves in it. "Hetty, let us tell," said the former eagerly. "Isabella will be quite safe, so she cannot mind, and she cannot prevent us."

"Oh yes, oh yes," sighed Hetty, "how kind of Sister Rachel to think of that. I can tell quietly to her, and then let every one know afterwards, but I couldn't stand up and confess before every one, could you, Jemmy?"

"No, no indeed," said Jemmy. "Have you a pencil, Hetty?"

"Yes, in my pocket, and a piece of paper."

"Then write down both our names, presently, when no one is looking, and run round through the cloister and drop the paper into the almsbox."

They were swinging all this time, and Hetty was just thinking of getting down to perform her errand before the prayer-bell should ring, when Isabella caught the swing and bringing it to a stop faced the disconcerted conspirators. "Are you thinking of putting yourselves into Sister Rachel's trap?" she asked in a low voice, that made their hearts stand still with fear. They did not reply, but she read their answer in their troubled faces. "Of course I wouldn't prevent you for the world," she continued sneeringly, "but I thought I'd just warn you first that if you do I'll make the place too hot to hold you. I think you two have done a few other things besides taking Lydia's sixpence, and ruining Charlotte."

"Isabella, you are very wicked," said Jemima, her face and lips becoming colourless, and Hetty burst into tears.

"You'd better take care," said Isabella in the same low tone, "you'll have a blue ribbon down on you if you don't look out, and then you'll find yourselves in a nice mess, I think."

The girls restrained themselves with difficulty.

"Oh, Isabella, do let us tell," pleaded Jemima, "we will not tell of you, indeed we will not. Oh, do let us tell."

"By all means," replied Isabella, "but you understand the consequences; look out for the workhouse, Jemmy, that's all."

At that moment the prayer-bell rang. Isabella walked off triumphantly, and Jemima and Hetty crept into chapel. There was no name in the almsbox that evening or the next, and on Sunday morning Sister Rachel gave back the key to Sister Mabel with a sigh.

The monitors were in despair.

"Have you spoken to the Father, Sister?" asked Miriam eagerly.

"Yes, my dear."

"And he believes Charlotte to be innocent?"

Sister Mabel shook her head.

"Oh!" burst from the monitors with a groan.

"My dears, there is not one single proof, however slight, that Charlotte is blameless; you and I believe she is because we know her disposition and how true she is, but only those who know her as we do can believe in her innocence in the face of what seems such conclusive evidence."

Carrie and Miriam burst into tears.

"Hush, my dears, there is still one expedient left; Sister Rachel's suggestion to pray daily for the clearing of your com-

panion's character. Let us do that heartily and perseveringly, and wait patiently, and then good will ultimately come out of this, though we do not yet know how."

But though Sister Mabel spoke encouragingly, her own heart was heavy indeed. The idea of secret wickedness brooding among her little flock was dreadful to her. She had planted, she had watered, she had watched and prayed; all that a mother's most careful love could do, had she done; and yet in spite of all this there was somewhere a hidden evil, a secret canker that threatened to destroy the fair fruit of her garden. Her heart was heavy with grief, and the children noticed how seldom she smiled, and how silent and abstracted she appeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

HINTS FOR MONITORS.

SISTER Mabel found the monitors waiting for her that same Sunday, after dinner, to beg her to come with them into the garden. They wanted to have her all to themselves, they said; so she complied, and they seated themselves comfortably under the same tree beneath which Lydia had spent her first afternoon at St. Mary's.

After an earnest discussion of all the various points of their great trouble, Mary Anne recurred to her suspicions of Jemima, and, as Sister Mabel had not heard full particulars of what had taken place between them, Mary Anne gave the whole story in detail, even to Jemima's refusal to shake hands with her.

"What would you want to shake hands with her for?" asked Miriam.

"Because I remembered what Carrie had said about monitors begging pardon if they'd been hasty or unjust," replied Mary Anne.

"Well now, I should just like to ask Sister what she thinks about that," said Miriam, "for you know I don't altogether agree with Carrie."

"What did Carrie say?" asked Sister Mabel.

Mary Anne repeated Carrie's observations almost word for word.

"Now what do you think about it, Sister?" asked Miriam, eagerly.

Sister Mabel's hand was before her face, and she did not immediately answer. She was inwardly returning thanks that one plant

at least in her garden bore such lovely buds of promise. "I think, dears," she said at last, "exactly as Carrie does about it."

Carrie looked pleased and grateful, Mary Anne satisfied, Martha thoughtful, and Miriam slightly annoyed.

"But Sister," said she, "would it not weaken the monitors' authority, if they were to be begging pardon of the younger girls when they made mistakes?"

"Do you know what is the strength of all authority, my child?" said Sister Mabel.

Miriam hesitated.

"*Confidence*, my little girl," said Sister Mabel, stroking Miriam's cheek. "Now to none is confidence so readily and lovingly given as to those who are brave and true enough to heartily acknowledge themselves wrong, when their conscience and judgment have convicted them. Let us take an instance from this which has lately happened. Has Charlotte made her position better or worse, do you think, by her brave apology to Lydia, the lowest girl in the school, for her rough behaviour to her in the dormitory?"

"Oh, better, certainly," said Mary Anne. "I have heard several girls say, if she'd own herself wrong to a child like Lydia, she wouldn't stand out about the sixpence."

Miriam still looked dissatisfied. "I thought, Sister, that authority ought always to be upheld."

"Undoubtedly, but not at the expense of justice." There was a pause. "The whole question lies in very small compass," continued Sister Mabel, "and we have such very plain rules for our guidance in this matter, that people must blind themselves wilfully indeed, if they choose to go wrong."

"What rules, Sister?"

"If thou bring thy gift to the altar," replied Sister Mabel, "'and there rememberest that thy brother *hath aught against thee*'—observe that, 'aught against thee'—any cause of complaint, that is, 'leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother,'—that must certainly mean, beg his pardon—'and then come and offer thy gift.' This is the law of Love, my children, the word of Him Whose Name is Love, and His laws admit of no exceptions."

"But wouldn't a monitor lose her authority?" urged Miriam, "if she was always to be begging pardon?"

"If she were always making occasions for apologies, I don't think she would be fit to be a monitor at all. But when a monitor is mistaken, or altogether in the wrong, I do not see what business she has to be thinking about her authority, or anything except how *best she may fulfil the commands of Him, in Whose Name she*

exercises her authority. But let me assure you, Miriam, that, since the world began, none have ever proved themselves mistaken, who have followed the simple rule of Love and Right."

"I don't think Miriam quite sees it yet," said Mary Anne, smiling.

"Well, I'll tell you what I was thinking at that moment," said Miriam, "I was thinking that it was quite right of you to have taken notice of Jemima's suspicious ways, and I can't see, therefore, what call there was for you, a monitor, who had only been doing your duty, to beg her pardon."

"I thought I'd falsely accused her," said Mary Anne.

"Well, what then?" returned Miriam, "I'm sure there was cause."

"That is not to the point, my child," said Sister Mabel. "Mary Anne's charge against Jemima implied that she had been guilty of falsehood. Now I know no accusation so galling as that. It is one so difficult to disprove. To accuse another of falsehood, therefore, on insufficient grounds, is a serious offence against charity."

"But in this case surely there were grounds," said Miriam.

"There were, and I am by no means blaming Mary Anne. She was perfectly justified in her suspicions; and, having those suspicions, she was quite right in acting as she did. Indeed she could not consistently with her duty have done otherwise. But I commend her because the moment she doubted in her own mind whether she had not been hasty, and therefore wrong in her judgment, she gave her companion the benefit of that doubt, and begged her pardon."

Mary Anne coloured with pleasure. Miriam was silent.

"Well, Miriam, what are you pondering so deeply?"

Miriam blushed, and hesitated. "It would sound so odd if I said it, Sister," she answered.

"Said what?"

"What I was thinking, Sister," she answered.

"What could it be?" said Martha.

"Do tell us," cried Mary Anne.

"We are all so curious now, Miriam, that it will be quite cruel not to enlighten us," said the Sister, smiling.

"Sister, dear," replied Miriam, hesitating more than ever, "it would sound disrespectful, I'm afraid; but I don't mean it so, indeed," she added, earnestly; "but you see, Sister, that text about leaving the gift before the altar,—that's only a rule for equals, isn't it? or for those below to those above them?"

Mary Anne laughed. "Miriam thinks it doesn't apply to monitors, Sister."

Miriam looked vexed. "I mean," she said, "that I didn't know that any one who had authority over others ever begged the pardon of those under them—not even monitors; and I thought that what was meant by upholding authority was—was—"

"For the monitor's superiors to back the monitor against all her companions, whether the said monitor were right or wrong?"

"Yes, Sister."

"Then I differ from you altogether, my little girl," said the Sister; "to my mind that would be destroying authority, and the root and spring of authority, which, as I observed just now, is confidence. For how can there be confidence where wrong is not only unrebuked but upheld? and where there is no confidence there can be no respect. Now if you destroy both confidence and respect, obedience is destroyed also. There may be the forced submission of the slave, a grudging, angry acquiescence in a power which is all the more hated because it cannot be resisted; but that lovely grace, obedience—the voluntary submission, that is, of a loving heart to a divinely appointed rule—is gone for ever. So you see, Miriam, your plan would not uphold authority but destroy it."

"But Sister, dear, when you have been scolding us monitors sometimes, you have said, 'I am very angry with you, but, so-and-so must be punished, because your authority must be upheld.'"

"I have said so more than once, I admit," said Sister Mabel, "but let us see what it was I was upholding. It is the special business of you monitors to see that order is kept and so forth. Now I think, if you will recall those 'scoldings' you speak of, you will find that I was not angry with you for your enforcement of any rule, but your disagreeable manner of doing it. That I thought you so wrong in that respect that it vexed me to have to receive your complaints against another, but that nevertheless as it was the monitor's business to see that rules were kept, I was obliged to punish the unfortunate 'so-and-so,' because your authority as to rules, must be enforced, and 'so-and-so' must not be allowed to break them simply because a monitor had lost her temper. But have I ever, my little woman," continued the Sister, kindly, "upheld wrong and injustice?"

"No, no," was the earnest cry of all the monitors, and Miriam's eyes filled with tears as she kissed Sister Mabel's hand, and said, "I knew it would sound disrespectful, Sister, darling; but indeed, I did not mean it so. I am so sorry I said it."

"I am quite sure it was not meant disrespectfully, and I am very glad you said it," replied Sister Mabel, smiling. "It is a good plan for people to shake out their difficulties, and air their thoughts *sometimes*, or else they get mouldy and moth-eaten. Have you any

more moth's eggs to be brushed out? Let us see them, if you have."

Miriam laughed, and thus encouraged, seemed about to say something, when she suddenly checked herself.

"Well?" said Sister Mabel.

"Sister, this will sound worse than what I said before."

"A moth-maggot, is it? that is more mischievous than mere moth's eggs; let us have him out and dispose of him."

The monitors laughed, but Miriam's difficulty in bringing out the 'maggot' was considerable; at last he was jerked forth thus: "Sister, I was thinking about Charlotte. You said that nothing was more galling than an accusation of falsehood; and I am sure Charlotte would feel none more than that. Well, you see the Father believes that she is both deceitful and dishonest, and we believe that she is wrongly accused. Now, Sister, supposing that we succeed in proving her innocence, would Mr. Neville—ought Mr. Neville—"

Here she came to a dead lock, and Carrie said wonderingly, "What can you be driving at, Miriam?"

Out came the 'maggot.' "Ought Mr. Neville to 'leave his gift before the altar' till he had made amends to Charlotte for the wrong he has done her?"

Mary Anne exclaimed with horror at the audacity of this speech, and Carrie and Martha looked too awe-struck to speak.

"That is a notable maggot, indeed," said Sister Mabel, "I am glad he has come to light."

"How could you say such a thing, Miriam?" exclaimed Carrie, recovering her breath.

"There is no harm, my love, in Miriam saying this to me," replied Sister Mabel, interposing, "there would have been great harm if she had spoken thus to any of her companions, for, remember, my children, it is a dangerous thing to discuss the conduct of those whom GOD has set over us, it is a breach of the fifth commandment. But where a difficulty like this has occurred to a child, it is wisest and best to lay the difficulty before her appointed instructor,—whether that person be Father, or Mother, or teacher—otherwise the maggot might do mischief. I know Miriam does not mean what she has said as any disrespect to the Reverend Father, but she fancies that he has committed an injustice towards Charlotte, and that troubles and puzzles her. So we had better look into this matter, and see if he has really done so. You must observe, Miriam, that he did not pounce down upon Charlotte with a suspicion of his own making. A distinct charge was made to him, and he did but investigate it to the best of his ability; then

the evidence being so strong against Charlotte, we can scarcely wonder that he believed her guilty, and, so believing, he could not have done otherwise than he did. But we cannot say that he wronged her, or was unjust; for there was no haste, no partiality. So when Mr. Neville brings 'his gift to the altar,' it can hardly be said that Charlotte has aught against him. He may have made a mistake, in the same way that a magistrate, or judge, may sometimes make mistakes in his decisions; but if the magistrate and judge have done their best, they cannot be accused of injustice and wrong."

"Miriam, you must be crazy to have supposed such a thing," exclaimed Carrie, quite indignantly.

Miriam looked distressed.

"If Miriam supposed it, I am glad she said it," said Sister Mabel. "I think it very important that you girls should understand something of the relationship of the governors and governed. You ambitious ones, who are continually saying that you mean one day to be upper servants, and so forth, will have to rule others who serve under you; and Miriam, who is training to be a school-mistress, needs particularly to be very clear in her understanding of the duties of those who govern, towards those who are governed. All forms of bullying, than which nothing is more detestable, unless, may be, spying and informing, arise from a want of a right understanding of these duties. Men, women, or children, who are only intent on asserting their dignity, and any small scrap of power assigned to them, are sure to be bullies, and a bully is one of the meanest and most contemptible objects that disfigure God's fair creation. And remember, any one may be a bully, by cowardly oppression of those who dare not resist. So we see monitors bullies, and elder brothers and sisters sometimes in families, or upper servants, and non-commissioned as well, perhaps, as commissioned officers in the Army and Navy, and masters and mistresses, sometimes, and foremen and forewomen, in short, every person in any post of authority, who has a mean and cowardly spirit, is a bully; and such, I trust, you, my children, may never be." The monitors looked thoughtful, and Sister Mabel added, as she rose, "I must go now, I have something I want to write before the bell rings for evensong. But remember this, my dears, the law of Love applies equally to every one, however high or however low, who is called by the Name of CHRIST. It admits of no exceptions. Whoever breaks it—be he who he may—must repair it, and that in the way appointed by Him, Who has said to all, 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' And rest assured, Miriam, that if we prove Charlotte's innocence, as I pray we may, to Mr.

Neville's satisfaction,—though he has done her no intentional wrong—I have known him long enough to be quite sure that he will not only feel regret for having caused her pain, but will express it." She smiled as she spoke, and patted Miriam's cheek, but seeing the girl's eyes filled with tears, she added, "And one word more to all: keep this in mind as a safe rule, whenever anything puzzles you,—be it what it may—something, that is, which you have an inward feeling had better not be discussed, never speak about it among yourselves, but ask the person whom God has set over you. All manner of difficulties, ay, and sins, might be avoided, if children would only remember this rule. As long as I am set over you, never shrink, my little girls, from telling me your puzzles, whatever they may be. If what you say is wrong, I will tell you so, but let us have it out by all means, or, like the tiresome moth-maggot, it may work sad havoc out of sight."

She kissed Miriam's forehead, and went off to her writing; but not much writing did she do that afternoon, for in the schoolroom, leaning on a desk, book in hand, but looking dreamily out of the window, sat poor Charlotte. She rose, and curtsied, as the Sister entered, and looked wistfully after her as she saw her open her room door,—so wistfully, that Sister Mabel paused as she was entering, and held out her hand. Charlotte sprang forward eagerly to seize it, and the Sister, leading her into her room, sat down with her back to her writing-table, and gave herself up to attend to the little girl and her troubles.

CHAPTER XIV.

SYMPATHY.

"**I** AM sorry, my child, very sorry," said Sister Mabel, as Charlotte laid her head down on her lap, and cried quietly, "that this unhappy affair has not been yet cleared up. But don't despond, my love, bear this cross humbly and patiently, and trust me you will one day be thankful for it."

"It must be found out some day who did it, mustn't it, Sister?" said Charlotte, wiping her eyes.

Sister Mabel hesitated.

"You think it will be found out soon, do you not, Sister?" repeated Charlotte anxiously.

"I am not sure that it will, very likely not," was the Sister's unexpected reply.

Charlotte uttered an exclamation of dismay; "But in story-books, Sister," said she, "naughty things done secretly, always come to light."

"In story-books, may be, but not always in real life. How often do we read of persons, eminent servants of GOD sometimes, bearing undeserved blame for years and years, and their characters uncleared perhaps till long after they had been laid to rest in a dishonoured grave."

"Oh, Sister, how dreadful, how horrible," exclaimed poor Charlotte, rising to her feet in her agitation. "What an awful punishment! Oh, I could never, never bear that. *Undeserved* blame, too; oh, Sister, I can bear blame when I know I have deserved it, but when I have not—"

"Hush, my child, don't agitate yourself; we are going to talk this matter over quietly, and examine whether it is really as horrible as you imagine."

"Oh yes, it is dreadful, it is horrible," exclaimed Charlotte passionately, but suffering the Sister to draw her down again by her side, "I could bear it patiently for a little while, because I know I have deserved punishment for my ill-conduct to Lydia, and Sister Rachel and you, Sister; but must I be punished all my life? Oh, it would not be just, I could not bear it!"

"Who was it said 'My punishment is greater than I can bear?'" asked the Sister.

"Cain," replied Charlotte.

"Yes, Cain; but David, the man after GOD's own heart, said something very different. Read the first part of the 71st verse of the 119th Psalm."

Charlotte took the prayer book Sister Mabel held out to her, and read, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble."

"Now look at the reason he gives for this."

Charlotte read again, "That I may learn Thy statutes."

"And see what he says in the 67th verse, 'Before I was troubled I went wrong; but now have I kept Thy word.' He rejoiced therefore in his trouble. Yet perhaps no man had ever more apparent reason to say with Cain, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.' The reason that he did not was because, unlike Cain, his heart was full of love, and he had a firm conviction that 'GOD is love;' and that which is sent by love, Charlotte, cannot be either horrible or unbearable. So St. Paul says, 'Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth;' and the angel, speaking of the blessed ones arrayed in white, whom St. John saw in perfect bliss before the

throne of God, said, 'These are they which came out of great tribulation.'"

"Ah!" interrupted Charlotte with a start, "I remember we puzzled so over those words some Sundays ago, Carrie and Rose and Lydia and I. It seemed so shocking, it quite frightened one."

"What seemed so shocking?"

"That if we would get to Heaven, we must always be so dreadfully punished."

"To be always apprehending punishment would be dreadful indeed," said Sister Mabel, "so dreadful that it would paralyse one, I think. But tribulation, my child, is not punishment."

"Not punishment, Sister?"

"Certainly not."

Charlotte looked astonished.

"If you are to go about thinking that this trouble which has come upon you is a punishment for having lost your temper with Lydia and Sister Rachel, and, if this mystery is not soon cleared up, and your character with it, that you are being punished for weeks and months, perhaps years, for the faults of one day, you would soon become soured and broken-spirited, my little girl; but if you were to perceive that your Heavenly FATHER had simply taken something from you for a time, or may be altogether, which was doing you harm, and altering the plan of your life a little to enable you to correct certain besetting faults of character which if unchecked, would make you a miserable woman, and perhaps lose you your Heavenly inheritance, do you not think that your tears would soon change to happy smiles, that your present despondency would give way to a thankful confidence in your Heavenly FATHER's wisdom and love; and that you would look cheerfully, lovingly, up to Him and say, 'My FATHER, it is good for me that I have been in trouble, do with me what Thou wilt, I am Thine, O save me. Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein is my desire. I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right; and that Thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled?'"

Charlotte's face brightened, but she looked puzzled.

"You children think it quite a serious punishment if one of you is kept in the schoolroom when the rest go out to play, do you not?"

"Yes, Sister."

"Well, suppose you had something the matter with your lungs, and I were to say to you, Charlotte, you must keep in the schoolroom and not go out with your companions till the wind shifts from the east. And suppose that the wind blew from the east for

six long weeks, and that for all that time you were not allowed to go out once in the playground, but through the window could see your companions at high games without being able to join them, should you say, 'Oh, how dreadful this is, I cannot bear it, it is too shocking?'

"No, certainly not, Sister dear," replied Charlotte, half amused, half wondering.

"No! I am surprised at that. To be kept shut up in the schoolroom for six weeks when all the rest were enjoying themselves seems to me a very severe punishment indeed."

"But it would not be a punishment at all, Sister," urged Charlotte.

"Not a punishment!"

"No. Certainly, it would be very disagreeable, and I dare say I should get sadly tired of it, oh, sadly tired," repeated Charlotte, reflecting as she thought of the fun that went on in the playground, "and I dare say I should not be able to keep from crying sometimes, but it would not be punishment, it would not be because you were displeased with me, Sister dear, but only because you were afraid I might be ill," and Charlotte kissed Sister Mabel's hand and looked lovingly up in her face.

"But should you not walk up and down the room pining and crying, and wringing your hands and saying, 'How dreadful this is, I really cannot bear it!' and would you not sit sadly apart without speaking, thinking only of your trouble in not being allowed to play with the rest, and would you not cry yourself to sleep every night thinking that though one weary day was gone there was another yet to come; and spend all your time at the window watching the weathercock to see when the wind changed?"

"Oh, Sister, no," exclaimed Charlotte eagerly, "it would be quite wicked if I did."

"Why so?"

"Surely it would be quite wicked to be grumpy and growly because something had been ordered for my good. Why, if I went on like that, it would serve me right to be let out into the playground and get inflammation of the lungs!"

"You think so, do you?"

"Yes, indeed, Sister."

"How should you spend your time then under such distressing circumstances?"

"Why, Sister, I wouldn't think about the playground more than I could help, and I would see what I could best do in doors. I'd get some nice piece of recreation work, I think, and make a surprise for some one. And I don't think I'd look at the weather-

cock at all, for fear it should make me impatient and discontented. I should know soon enough when the wind changed, and it wouldn't change any the sooner for my watching it."

Sister Mabel smiled. "But if any one came in wouldn't you look very mournful and sad, and ask them to sympathise with you?"

"Oh, Sister, no. People would think me quite a nuisance. I'd be pleasant and merry with them, and then perhaps they'd come oftener to sit with me."

"But would not you say sometimes to them, or at least to yourself, 'How hardly Sister Mabel treats me! How cruel she is! Why should I be treated like this?'"

"No, never, Sister dear," exclaimed Charlotte throwing her arms round Sister Mabel's neck. "What, call you cruel and hard when you'd been so thoughtful for me! So like my own mother that you had taken so much care of my health, and were so afraid I might be ill. Oh, Sister, I should be a wretch if I only thought such a thing for one single minute!"

Sister Mabel warmly returned her child's embrace, and said, "And what are we, my little girl, if we fret and pine, and will not be comforted, and think hard thoughts of our Heavenly FATHER, and say, 'this is horrible, this is more than I can bear,' simply because, in His sweet thoughtful love, His more than a mother's care for us, He has taken from us something that was doing us harm?"

Charlotte seemed struck by this thought; she laid her head down on the Sister's shoulder, and for a few minutes neither spoke. Presently Charlotte said, "Sister, what do you mean God has taken from me? what was doing me harm?"

"What has been taken from you? Why your good-conduct medal, and with it your place in the school; Mr. Neville's good opinion, and the confidence of many of your companions in your truth and honesty."

Charlotte winced. "Were these things doing me harm, Sister?"

"Undoubtedly, or they would not have been taken away. Whenever we are deprived of anything without any apparent cause we may be quite certain that it was in some way or other, though we, perhaps, have no idea how, doing us harm; or that its loss (even if the thing itself were not absolutely hurtful) will be in some way exceedingly beneficial to us."

Charlotte pondered. "I cannot think how the loss of Mr. Neville's good opinion can be good for me. I think," she said hesitatingly, "I might find out the loss of my medal was good—because—because—perhaps, Sister," here she hesitated still more, "it is possible that I may have been conceited about it."

"Very possible indeed," said Sister Mabel.

"But how can it be good that the girls should think I have lied?" Charlotte spoke with a fierce emphasis on the last word, and an angry spot mounted to her cheek.

"Because it is also very possible that you were proud of your good character for truthfulness. You are *naturally* truthful. You have never known the struggles some have gone through to acquire this precious grace; but instead of being humbly thankful for having had such a gift bestowed upon you without any labour or effort of your own, you have made it an occasion of self-glorification, at the expense, may be, of some of your companions."

Charlotte looked startled. "How do you know that, Sister?"

"I have guessed it from my observation of you. But I may be mistaken. Now sit quiet for two minutes by my watch, and tell me whether you think I am or not."

At the end of a few minutes, for Charlotte took more than two to consider the matter, she ruefully admitted that she thought Sister Mabel was right.

"That being the case, then," continued the Sister, "surely it is no subject of repining that your companions should for a while humble you by their doubts."

"Ah," sighed Charlotte; then added, "but Mr. Neville, Sister. How can it be good that I should have lost his good opinion, that he should think me—what he does think me?" and she sighed heavily again.

"Because you thought a great deal too much of his good opinion."

"Oh, Sister, is that possible?"

"Quite possible, my dear. The spur to all your efforts was the sole hope of pleasing him—of being well reported of to him—of hearing him say, or that he had said, 'Well done, little Armstrong.'"

"Ah, he said that when I won my medal," said Charlotte smiling while the tears stood in her eyes; "and mother was so pleased when I told her, and she said that not one of us could ever do enough to show him how grateful we all were to him. For only think, Sister, what a friend he has been to us ever since father died, see what he's done for my brother, and I should never have been here at all but for him," she kissed the Sister's hand as she spoke. "So whom should I try to please if not him? and you too, Sister," she added hastily, "I want to please you just as much."

"That is all very right, and amiable, and as it should be," *replied the Sister* smiling, "and up to a certain point such feelings

were very good for you. But you had got beyond that point, and they were beginning to harm you."

"How could that be?" exclaimed Charlotte in amazement.

"You rested in them, they hindered you from doing right, from any higher motive than merely pleasing us. Moreover you accustomed yourself to expect our approval, to be vexed if you did not obtain some outward mark of it: and, worse than that, I am afraid it has, more than once, led you to ungenerous feelings towards some of your companions, a mean desire to be first at their expense, to being vexed if some one of them received marks of notice or approval which you fancied all your due. And if this had gone on, the end would have been that you would have become a jealous, and, therefore, a mean and ungenerous woman. Now, do you think it 'horrible and unbearable,' that a love beyond all human love—a thoughtfulness beyond mine or your mother's, should, such being the case, have taken out of your way that which was spoiling your disposition, and given you an opportunity of trying whether you could not work as hard, and be as diligent in well-doing though no word of praise followed your efforts—though they were unobserved or, perhaps, even misunderstood?"

The warm-hearted girl wound her arms closely round the Sister and her tears fell in silence; and though she felt this last trial would be almost more than she could bear, her young heart was inexpressibly cheered by the belief fast growing within her that it was somehow all right, that it was all sent in love; that though very painful now, it would all come right some day.

"I will try to bear it, Sister dear," she said as she wiped her eyes and tried to smile. "But oh, Sister," she added in another burst of grief, "you will love me, won't you? you won't misunderstand me, will you? Sister, I could not live without being loved."

"You need not fear me, my child," replied the Sister tenderly, "still," she said smiling, "you must learn to be able to do even without me. Suppose I should in one way or other be taken away from you?"

"I can't bear to suppose anything of the sort," said Charlotte.

"There is no need to look forward to things that would be painful to us before they happen," returned Sister Mabel, "nevertheless, it is as well to prepare ourselves for them in case such things should be; so in case, my little girl, as years go on you should ever feel lonely and disheartened, remember, that, if we work to please Him, Whose name is Love, Love that can never change or fail, there will flow into our hearts that peace which passeth all understanding. For only think how delightful it is to remember that

He can never misunderstand us, that not one effort to please Him is ever overlooked or undervalued by Him. Earthly friends can only see a part of what we do to please them; they cannot see the motive, and perhaps are not pleased with our work; but He looks only to the motive, not to the work; however badly done that work may be, if it is done with the true loving desire to please Him, He is pleased, better pleased than with the skilful work of one who loves Him less, and He accepts it with those precious words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' 'She has done what she could.' 'She loved much.' "

There was again a pause, during which Charlotte wondered what she should do without Sister Mabel, and the Sister meditated sadly on the child's passionate appeal, "You will love me? You won't misunderstand me? I could not live without being loved!"

Charlotte was one of those with whom love is a passion indeed, warm-hearted, generous, sensitive, ready to make any sacrifice for those whom she loved, yet expecting, claiming, love for love; and Sister Mabel felt that were the girl's strong affections chilled, thrown back, or, worse than all, deceived, hers was a nature that would recoil on itself in all the worst bitterness of a broken spirit; or that, were the object of her love removed by death, her affection would grow morbid in its very endurance and fidelity. She knew those words, "I could not live without being loved," were absolutely true as concerned the young speaker, and her heart ached as she thought of the terrible wounds and bruises such a nature would receive in its contact with the world. She would speak one word, she thought, now that there seemed an opportunity; it might not be understood, and, perhaps be soon forgotten, but she trusted that the remembrance might return some day in an hour, may be, of trial.

She lifted the girl's head off her knee: "Charlotte," she said, "come with me to the window. Look at that lovely blue sky, just flecked here and there with snowy clouds. Is it not beautiful?"

"Very beautiful, Sister."

"And is not this summer breeze delightful, blowing in at the open window?"

Charlotte assented.

"Do you perceive how fragrant it is?"

"Yes, Sister, it is the smell of the new-mown hay."

"And listen, what is that singing?"

"A lark, Sister. Oh, more than one, there are three, singing with all their might. I love them so, they always seem so glad. *Look, Sister, there they are. Dear little fellows.*"

"And how pleasant the sound and sight of the children in the playground is, they seem almost as happy as the larks."

"Yes, Sister."

"Now I am going to say something to you which I want you to remember all your life, and I have brought you to the window that all your senses may help you to remember what I am going to say. Whenever you see the summer's soft blue sky, or feel its gentle breezes, or smell its delicious perfumes, or hear the song of birds, or the voices of happy children, I pray that sight, and sense, and smell, and hearing, may recall my words to your remembrance."

The Sister spoke so earnestly, that Charlotte looked startled, and crept closer to her.

"Charlotte, my child," continued the Sister, "God has given you a remarkably loving and sensitive heart. And this is a talent committed to you to be used for Him; and it is one of the very best and choicest of all His gifts. But remember He will therefore require the stricter account of what you have done with it. You said just now that 'you could not live without being loved.' My little girl, God does not send us into the world to be loved, but to love; not to receive, but to give. Now listen a moment to that happy bird, it is singing as if it were in an ecstasy of thanksgiving."

Charlotte listened, and all her senses drank in the delights of that sweet summer day.

"Charlotte, the talents God entrusts to us He designs as our choicest blessings, but we may turn them into deadliest snares. This is true of all His gifts, but especially of warm and sensitive affections. Now it is the great danger of natures like yours to pour themselves out in love with a most ardent desire of being loved in return. But this is only a low and selfish affection. If it is checked—that is, if its love is not returned—it turns sour, or sinks in despondency, perhaps dies of a broken heart. Or if the object of its love is removed by death it becomes morbid, it refuses to be comforted—it says, 'I will go down to the grave mourning.' But it is God Himself, our loving FATHER, who has caused that love to be disappointed, or has taken from it its earthly object. And I will tell you why. Because the love in that heart was being wasted, it was doing no good; indeed, it was doing the soul that possessed it harm, for it was making it selfish. Mark that, Charlotte, it was making it *selfish*. So the LORD stops its overflow, He dams it up, as the miller dams the mill stream, so that instead of running to waste, a shallow stream, doing no particular good, it may become deep and strong, and turn the mill-wheel that grinds the corn for so many hungry families."

Charlotte's eyes opened wide with wonder. "I don't think I understand you, Sister," she said.

"Do you remember last Michaelmas Day, our walk to Penfold woods?"

"Oh, yes, Sister."

"Do you recollect our coming to a little spring banked round with rock, that held it in? and how deep it was, and how exquisitely cool? and how we all drank of it, and then bathed our faces and hands in it and felt so refreshed?"

"Oh, yes, Sister," said Charlotte again.

"If we could have broken down those rocky sides, and let the spring disperse itself where it pleased, could we have done all that?"

"Oh, no, Sister, it would have been too shallow, and if it had been shallow it would have got warm with the sun, like the brook just before you come to Penfold, and so it wouldn't have been half so nice to drink; and then, besides, perhaps animals might have walked into it and soiled it with their feet, as we saw the cows walking in that brook, and the donkey, don't you remember, Sister?"

"I remember. Well, so the LORD sometimes banks up our hearts, and drives our love back again, as it were, into our hearts, that it may gather there into a deep pool of living love."

Charlotte still looked perplexed.

"I will try and make my meaning clearer. Suppose, Charlotte, that after you left this place, and were out in the world by yourself, you found that those persons whom you most loved, for whom perhaps, you were making great sacrifices, did not care for your love—not only did not return it, but did not care for it; that they were willing to make use of it for their own purposes, that they were ready enough to accept your sacrifices on their behalf, but that they did not understand you, did not sympathise with you; that they cared nothing for your joys, and less for your sorrows; or suppose, Charlotte, that worse than that, you found that your love had been misplaced, betrayed—that your sacrifices had been for some one utterly unworthy; that you had been loving with all your heart, with all the wealth of your loving self-devotion, and that you had been deceived in this person whom you had thought worthy to be so loved; that you discovered that he or she was utterly selfish, heartless and mean;—now, Charlotte, in the event of such a sorrow happening to you, there would be two lines of conduct open to you. You shall choose now which you think would be the line your loving FATHER (who had allowed all this to befall you) intended you to follow then. To gather your wasted love

back into your heart, and say, 'I will never love again, I will never trust again; my sun has gone down while it was yet day; henceforth the path of life is to me utter desolation:' to shut your heart against all proffered affection henceforth; to creep about your daily tasks with eyes dimmed with weeping, with shattered nerves and broken spirits, with fast declining health and withered energies; to long for death as a time of rest, to grow weary of living in so hard and heartless a world, and to hail the end of it as a blessed deliverance:" (the Sister spoke very slowly and with marked emphasis, and Charlotte listened breathlessly, her eyes fixed on the Sister's;) "or, now mark the other line, my child,"—(the Sister's voice became lower and more emphatic, a lovely light shone in her eyes, a deep glow mantled on her cheek,) "or to let GOD Himself drive back that squandered love into your inmost heart, and say, 'As now, thank GOD, I know the bitterness of disappointed love, none shall ever be disappointed in mine, none shall love me without return, none shall seek sympathy of me and go away disheartened, my heart shall be a fount of love for all who need it.' And shall I tell you what would be the result? People would soon find out that hidden spring and would come to it; weary hearts would come to rest there; heavy laden hearts to lay their burden there; happy hearts because they were happy; sad hearts because they were sad; little children would come and play there; sick children to be soothed and comforted; merry children to find fresh merriment; and to one and all, to young and old, to happy and sad, to sick and well, that heart would be a never failing spring of love and sympathy. Charlotte, which lot would you choose?"

"Oh, that last, Sister dear," replied the child, never moving her eyes from the Sister's glowing face.

"Do you think such a one could be unhappy?"

"Oh, no!"

"Child," said the Sister, in a tone Charlotte never forgot, "it would be the life of a GOD!" She paused from very excess of emotion, then added, "And to such a life,—a GOD-like life—would the FATHER, Whose Name is Love, raise His creature when in His love, that passeth all understanding, He took from her objects that were absorbing her affections and rendering them useless."

There was a slight pause, then the Sister resumed, "I said, such a life,—a life, that is, of unceasing love, unfailing sympathy—would be the life of 'a GOD;' and I may justly say so, for it was the life of our Blessed LORD and SAVIOUR. He could lay His burden on no human heart; no one, not even His Blessed Mother, could understand Him, and sympathize with Him, or, indeed, could

love Him as He deserved to be loved; but who ever came to Him for love, and help, and sympathy, and went away disappointed? When He craved for sympathy in the garden of agony, 'Tarry ye here, and watch with Me,' and was disappointed, for the watchers slept all through that dreadful hour of loneliness and bitter desolation, did He therefore shut up His love in bitterness? Oh, no! At the moment of His degradation in the High Priest's house, when He was being struck on the face and spit upon, and denied by His own Apostle, He could yet think of that Apostle's grievous necessities, and turned on him that look of love which converted him from the erring, self-confident Peter, into Peter the Saint; and when every agony that the wickedness of man could devise had been heaped upon Him, He had words of sweetest love and sympathy for the wretched thief who had before outraged and blasphemed Him."

Again there was silence for a few moments. Charlotte wound her arms closely round the Sister, and laid her head on her breast; and the Sister looked dreamily away into the summer sky, lost for awhile in the thoughts her own words had suggested. She came back from them presently, however, saying, "So, Charlotte, my child, years hence, when Sister Mabel and you are separated, when, perhaps, she is lying in her grave, remember this bright summer day when she said this to you—That nothing is evil that comes to us from GOD: that if human love fails, or is taken from us, it is only that our affections may be *intensified* by being made entirely unselfish." Sister Mabel stroked the girl's hair back from her face, and continued—"Do you remember what we read last Friday about the cocoa-nuts, and what some of you girls remarked about them afterwards?"

"Yes, Sister."

"What was it?"

"Why, Sister, we said how nice it would be, as it was such a hot day, if we had a cocoa-nut tree in our garden, and when we were very thirsty, as we were then, if we could just gather a cocoa-nut fresh, and crack it, and find a delicious draught of milk inside."

"Well, Charlotte, when you're a woman grown, remember this: if it should ever please GOD to 'break your heart,' He means it to break like a cocoa-nut, not a flint. He means that out of it should flow 'delicious milk,' for every one who is thirsty and tired, milk always flowing, too, and never exhausted. And if ever He should *bruise* your heart, He would bruise it like a bunch of grapes, that choice wine may be pressed out of it, 'strong drink' for 'him that is ready to perish,' (the 'strong drink' of brave words, that is, of *hope and encouragement* for some poor soul at the point of des-

pair) 'and wine for those that are of heavy hearts'—the wine of cheering sympathy and love. And if He should seem to *crush* your heart, my child, if one grinding affliction after another follows in quick succession, remember, that if His children's hearts are crushed and ground, it is that they may yield fine flour; flour to make that 'bread which strengtheneth man's heart,' bread, as strengthening food for man, woman, and child; and more than that—flour to make all manner of nice things for the sick and suffering; and even cakes to please little children, and," added she smiling, "even pap for babies. I wonder if my little maid understands me." She patted the girl's cheek as she spoke.

"I think I do, Sister," said Charlotte, "but—"

"But what?"

"I do not like to think about sorrow, Sister; I do not like," and her lip quivered, "to think about my heart being broken."

"Nor need you, nor should you, my child," replied Sister Mabel, quickly. "I would not for worlds that you should. Not one of God's children should think of anything but His love and tenderness towards them, and the blessings and pleasures with which He has surrounded them; especially His little ones, who should be as merry as birds the whole day long. There is no need for you to think of anything now but how blue the sky is, and how sweet the perfume of the new-mown hay, and how charmingly those birds are still singing, and what a delightful air there is, just enough to prevent the day from being too hot; and how pleasant it is to have such a good friend as Carrie;" she pointed to the young monitor who just then crossed the playground. "Run out now, and join her, and be as merry as you can."

"Merry? Ah, that reminds me of something I wanted to ask you, Sister. The day we had that talk about those 'that came out of great tribulation,' Rose asked Sister Ruth if we might think of our Lady as being merry. What do you think, Sister?"

"What did Sister Ruth say?"

"Sister Ruth said, 'Oh, yes, always sweet and cheerful;' but that didn't satisfy Rose, and she asked again, 'but might we think of her as merry?' And then Sister Ruth said, 'Yes.' But what do you think, Sister?"

"What makes you ask this question, Charlotte? Have you been picturing Blessed Mary to yourself as always sad?"

"Why, Sister, if any one came out of great tribulation, it was she, and all the pictures of her make her look so sweet, but so grave."

"You must remember that her 'great tribulation' did not come upon her till her high destiny had been announced to her by the

Angel; and she had passed her childhood then. We can scarcely fancy her 'merry'—as the word is generally understood—after that, though, always, as Sister Ruth observed, 'sweet and cheerful.' But in the absence of any record of her childhood, I think we may venture to believe that she was a very merry child."

"Really! how nice! But why do you think so, Sister?"

"Because it is as natural for children to be merry as for little birds to sing, or for the squirrels we saw in Penfold woods, to crack nuts, and run up and down the trees. If a child is not merry, you may be sure, as a general rule, that it is either ill or *naughty*. Now as we may be pretty sure that our LORD's 'Lily' could not have been 'naughty,' and as we have no reason to suppose that she was otherwise than well and strong, we have every reason to believe that, as a child, she was *merry*; and—as the clearer a child's conscience is, the merrier it is—Blessed Mary's conscience being so pure, she must have been a very merry, light-hearted child, indeed."

"How nice, how very nice! I will tell Rose, Sister. We were wondering the other day, whilst we were getting cool, after we'd been running races, whether we might ever think of our Lady as playing games, and dancing. Sister, do you think our Lady ever danced?"

"'Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance.' The Hebrew maidens seem to have been very fond of dancing, and as our Lady was a Hebrew maiden, she would naturally be fond of dancing too. I have no doubt at all but that she danced a great deal, and very well too. Indeed, you may tell Rose that I can fancy our Lady, when she was a little girl, being quite a leader in the sports and dances of her young companions."

"That is very nice: but then, Sister, what do people mean by saying that our Lady was always 'recollected.' I remember Sister Rachel saying one day to Rose and me, 'If you were really trying to be like Blessed Mary, you'd be more recollected;' doesn't 'recollected' mean very grave?"

"Oh, no, my dear. When we say persons are 'recollected,' we simply mean that, however merry they may be, they never forget the Presence of God. Never 'forget themselves,' as it is commonly said—that is, never forget they are God's children, and in His Sight. But that would not make them less merry, it would only prevent their doing anything unseemly in their mirth, such as being boisterous, rude, or vulgar. Perhaps you and Rose were all three when Sister Rachel spoke to you."

"We were making a great noise, Sister."

"And that was not maidenly, not nice, and therefore not at all like Blessed Mary."

Charlotte had forgotten all her troubles when she joined Carrie and Rose in the playground. They were recalled to her mind, however, by a sharp pang, as the children came out of chapel after evensong. Mr. Neville was walking towards the orphanage, accompanied by the Mother Superior, and his youngest daughter. They all three nodded and smiled at the children as they passed, but Mr. Neville's glance was stern as it rested for a moment on Charlotte, Miss Mary Neville looked at her with a sort of wondering pity, and the Superior gravely shook her head.

Charlotte was discovered a little while after by Sister Mabel crying bitterly in a corner of the playground. "The wind is still in the east, is it?" said the Sister, smiling, when she heard the cause of her woe, "well, that is not pleasant. But remember your own words, 'the wind will not change any the sooner for your watching it, and observing the weathercock will only make you discontented.'"

"Ah, I did say that, I remember, Sister dear. And now the sun's come out, that's you, Sister," said the little girl, wiping her eyes and smiling, "I don't so much mind which way the wind is."

CHAPTER XV.

MARK'S STOCKINGS.

THAT next visiting day was by no means so pleasant to either Charlotte or Lydia as its predecessor. Charlotte was grievously perplexed as to how she should make her mother understand where she had been to blame, and where she had not; and Lydia felt distressed at having to tell Mark that his lucky sixpence had occasioned nothing but misfortune; and dreaded coming across Mrs. Armstrong lest she should suppose her the cause of her daughter's disgrace.

Mrs. Armstrong, indeed, was in consternation at finding Charlotte under a cloud. She kept incessantly repeating that Mr. Neville had been the best friend she ever had, and how could Charlotte do anything to lose his favour: till at last the poor girl in despair fetched Sister Mabel, who carried Mrs. Armstrong off into her private room, where it is to be hoped she succeeded in making the good woman's mind more easy.

Meantime Lydia, curled up in Mark's arms, whispered in his ear the sad history of her sixpence. Mark in great concern pro-

duced another from his pocket which he proposed to make lucky by punching a hole in it. But this Lydia would not allow.

"Mark," said she earnestly, "I will not have another lucky sixpence."

"Well, have one that isn't lucky. See, here's one almost new. Take this and buy something pretty with it."

But Lydia steadily resisted. "I won't take money from you, Mark," she said. "Don't you work hard to pay money for me every week? No, no, I won't have any money."

"Then what shall I bring you, Liddy? See, all them girls have something their friends have brought; what shall I bring you?"

"I'll tell you, Mark," replied Lydia suddenly, "something I should like, oh, so much."

"Then you shall have it, my lass," exclaimed Mark, bringing his clenched hand down on his knee with great emphasis; "what is it?"

But the honest fellow was puzzled indeed when Lydia whispered, "A pair of your stockings, Mark; the very oldest pair you have!"

"A pair of my stockings!"

Lydia nodded.

"Why, what ever would be the use of them?"

"Never you mind," said Lydia, "but let me have them as soon as you can, Mark dear, before next visiting day; and please let them be the oldest pair you have."

Mark laughed. "Well I shall be troubled to tell which on 'em is the oldest, for my toes and heels are out of them all, I reckon."

Lydia seemed quite delighted. "Do you think you could let me have them soon?" she said.

"I'll walk over with them next Sunday," said the good-natured fellow, thinking only how he could best please his little sister. "You shall have them, Liddy, never fear. I suppose now you'll be wanting them for some games you're at with the other girls."

Lydia pressed her hands upon her lips to keep back her merriment, but her eyes were full of laughter as she nodded assent.

"And you're sure the oldest will be good enough; because you shall have any pair I have, if you like."

"Oh the very oldest, please, Mark," replied the little girl, with a ringing hearty laugh.

"Well, so be it then," said Mark, "you look out for them next Sunday about this time."

They did not so much mind the parting this day, as Mark was to go to chapel, and indeed had been there in the morning, so he informed Lydia, having dined on a beautiful grey rock that he

knew of on a part of St. John's Common overlooking the whole of the buildings of the Sisterhood.

This, as the first day of Mark's availing himself of Sister Mabel's permission to spend his "visiting Sunday," in and about St. Mary's, was a great event in his and Lydia's lives, and an epoch to be dated from.

The following Sunday just before evensong, Sister Mabel entered the schoolroom with a small parcel in her hand. "Something for you, Lydia," said she, putting it into the hands of the delighted little girl; "your brother has just left it with his love."

"A present! oh, how nice!" exclaimed Sanna; and she, with one or two others, drew near in eager expectation to see what treasure Lydia would unfold.

A shout of laughter made Sister Mabel look too.

"My dear child! what can you be going to do with those stockings?" she asked in surprise. But a very torrent of jokes from the merry children on Lydia's good fortune and Mark's generosity prevented the little girl's reply.

"Don't be so silly," said she to Rose, who was laughing more than any. "You should not laugh so, they are Mark's stockings."

"I beg Mark's pardon, I'm sure," replied Rose, laughing, however, with redoubled mirth at Lydia's serious manner and voice. "Stockings, are they? Well, if they had toes, to say nothing of heels, one might believe it."

Lydia softly touched the Sister's hand. "Sister, don't let her laugh. Mark cannot help their being old."

"Rose won't laugh, if it vexes you, dear;" upon which, Rose threw her pinafore over her face, and went off to explode quietly in a corner by herself.

Even Sister Mabel looked rather amused as she repeated her question, "But what can you want those old stockings for, my dear?"

"That is a secret, Sister," whispered Lydia.

"Indeed! then I will be very discreet, and ask no more questions." She laughed as she patted the little girl's cheek, and walked away; while Lydia secured the old stockings in a small box, in which she kept her treasures.

For some days so much mirth prevailed about the munificent present it was supposed Mark had made his sister, that she kept them close, hoping her companions would soon forget all about them. They did at last, and then, one lovely evening, when they were all at play out of doors, Lydia coaxed Carrie into the empty schoolroom, and having seated her by one of the windows, took out the mysterious stockings, and placed them in her lap.

"Carrie," she whispered, looking round lest any mischief-maker

should be within hearing, "I want you to do me a *great* favour, oh! a very great favour, indeed."

"What can it be!" exclaimed Carrie, looking first at the stockings, and then at her little companion.

Lydia knelt down at Carrie's feet, placed her elbows on her knees, rested her chin on her hands, and looking up anxiously in her companion's face, said, "Carrie, you know I've been in the mending class now some time; and one day, the week before last, Sister Ruth said my darning was 'very good;' only think of that, Carrie,—'very good'—and she showed it to Sister Mabel. She did, indeed." And Lydia nodded her head several times in evident satisfaction.

"Well?" said Carrie.

"Well," repeated Lydia, "you know Mark has no one to look after his clothes, and mend them, Carrie, properly; and so I thought I'd try and mend his stockings for him, one pair at a time. He don't know what I'm going to do; I think it'll surprise him; he don't know I can mend, yet; I think he'll be pleased; what do you think, Carrie?"

Carrie's answer was an affectionate hug, which was a very satisfactory evidence of her concurrence in Lydia's expectations. "But what am I to do?" she asked.

"Oh, Carrie, dear, these stockings are so shocking, so much worse than anything we have to mend here, that I don't know how to set about them; I don't know how to begin. Will you show me, Carrie? please do, dear; and then, Carrie, I want you to tell me how I can get a needle and some cotton."

"Well, as to the cotton," replied Carrie, examining the stockings,—"they'll take a deal!" this was in parenthesis—"we must make love to Sister Ruth, and see if she'll let us buy some out of the store-box. Have you any pence?"

"Oh, Carrie, how unfortunate!" exclaimed Lydia, looking ready to cry. "Mark offered me sixpence, and I wouldn't take it. What shall I do?"

"Perhaps Mark will pay for the cotton when he gets his stockings, and perhaps Sister Ruth will trust you till then. I'll find out for you. But when are you going to do these stockings, Lydia? there'll be a deal of work in them."

"Now, of evenings, in recreation time," said Lydia eagerly, "and I want to begin now directly, at once."

"I don't think Sister Mabel will like your sitting in here poking over a piece of darning these fine evenings; you'll have to take it out into the playground."

Lydia's countenance fell; the mending of the stockings seemed

beset with difficulties. "I'd rather do it here," she sighed, "the girls laugh so." Then a sudden thought striking her, she added, the tears standing in her eyes, "you want to be out in the playground, though, it would be very selfish of me to keep you in."

"You wait here," said Carrie, "and I'll go and get leave for everything; darning-cotton and all." She kissed her little companion, and was off before she had time to thank her. What a time she seemed gone, to be sure! Lydia sighed more than once with impatience; but oh! how happy she was when Carrie finally returned with cottons and needles, and permission to spend, at least, some part of that evening in the schoolroom.

Never did skilful embroideress bend with greater delight over the costliest labour of the needle, than Lydia over that pair of 'shocking stockings,' while Carrie, sitting by her, gave the benefit of her suggestions and advice (for indeed these stockings required some considerable ingenuity and experience for the mending of them.) The shouts of merriment from the playground had no effect upon her, she did not even hear them, though Carrie every now and then looked out to see what fun was in hand, and now and then made an excursion into the playground, joined in a game or two, ran herself out of breath, and then returned to her post. But of all this Lydia was oblivious. Too much absorbed to talk, she bent over her work, every sense for the time being converted into darning-cotton. As it drew near the time when the prayer bell might be expected to ring, Carrie tried to persuade her to put up her work, and have at least one run out of doors before bed-time, but Lydia was not persuadable.

"Do you go, now, Carrie, dear, and thank you so much. I can get on now quite by myself; if I do want you again I'll call you. But please go out quite, Carrie, now: I don't want to, indeed; I want to work till bed-time."

But to this Carrie demurred; she was not quite sure that permission to spend 'some part of the evening in the schoolroom,' meant that Lydia should go on darning till bed-time. Unable, however, to resist the pleading of those soft dark eyes, and the coaxing "Ah, Carrie, dear," she allowed the little workwoman the benefit of the doubt, and left her to her own devices.

It was with a sigh of regret that Mark's stockings were consigned to their hiding-place when the inexorable bell sounded forth its summons. It is certain that Lydia dreamt of them all that night, and to be feared that the thoughts of them mingled somewhat interferingly with her lessons next day.

They were some time in hand, those same stockings, for recreation time was so often broken in upon. Lydia must play at this

or that, another was wanted to make up the game, it would throw everything out if she refused, and under these circumstances the goodnatured child never did refuse; and sometimes the Sisters would not allow her to stay in the schoolroom when the weather was so fine and warm; but this difficulty she overcame by conquering her dislike of being laughed at, and taking her work with her out into the playground, where, after some teasing, she was pretty generally allowed (except when, as stated above, she was wanted to make up a game) to have her own way.

But though forced to yield to these difficulties, her will never flagged. Day after day saw the patient child still busy with her really troublesome task, till at length one happy evening Carrie drew the stockings on her hand, examined them carefully, and pronounced them quite finished.

"Upon my word, Lydia, I'd no idea you could darn so well. I'm sure Sister Ruth will be quite pleased. Why, you darn better than any of us. And what a labour! I wonder you had patience, why these stockings are quite a curiosity."

Lydia clapped her hands with delight, danced round the room, and jumped over two or three forms, after which she hugged Carrie with all her might.

"Rose, Rose," cried the latter, "come here and be ashamed of yourself. Come and see something you'd never have had patience or skill enough to do yourself."

Rose came with all speed. "Where is it, and what is it?" she said.

"Here, these are the stockings, Mark's stockings, that you laughed at so. Lydia has been mending them for him as recreation work. Isn't it good of her? and aren't they well done? Did you ever see such darning?"

"I see the darning," replied Rose demurely, "but where are the stockings?"

"Don't be a goose, Rose. Come, confess you'd never have had patience to have mended a pair of stockings like that."

"No, indeed," replied Rose mischievously. "If my brother had required me to make an entirely new pair of stockings in darning stitch as Lydia has done, I should have begged him to buy himself a new pair ready wove or knit, or else go barefoot."

Lydia coloured with annoyance. "Mark did not bring them, I asked for them, he does not know what I wanted them for. He has no one to mend his things for him, and he cannot afford to buy new ones, for he spends so much money on me."

She was nearly crying, but Rose did not perceive it. "Well, *it's capital darning*," said she, getting into a swing, "but," she

continued, pushing herself off, "it was quite a waste of recreation time, for they really weren't worth the trouble."

"I don't know that it was a waste of time, Rose," remarked Miriam, who had just come up, and was examining Lydia's work; "it has been famous practice for Lydia, I'm sure Sister Ruth will say she has improved immensely."

"Oh, I didn't say it was a waste of time," replied Rose from the swing, "I only said it was a waste of recreation time, because we're not required to practise work in play hours; I'm sure we've plenty of time to practise darning in school hours."

Lydia looked from one speaker to the other in vexation. The sunshine that had filled her heart, was fast dying out.

"Well, at any rate, Lydia, you have improved yourself," said Miriam. "It's a pity though you wasted your work and your time on such things as these, for really these stockings weren't worth it. Were they, Carrie?"

Carrie was Lydia's last hope, she turned eagerly towards her.

"Well, no, they weren't certainly," replied Carrie. "I'm afraid it's partly my fault that Lydia's wasted so much time over them, but I never thought she'd go on plodding as she has. The only thing for them would have been to new foot them. But I couldn't help her there, for I don't know how myself."

"Well, I think you and Lydia were a couple of geese," was Rose's complimentary remark.

"Never mind, Lydia," said Carrie kindly, seeing how downcast the child looked, "Sister Ruth will be pleased with your darning, I'm sure."

But Lydia had not worked to please Sister Ruth, so this assurance gave her no pleasure. She had had a definite purpose and aim, and judging by her companions' observations had missed it. They, having no idea of the disappointment their words had caused, were soon engaged in their own concerns, while Lydia gathering up the stockings climbed on the window-seat, and pressing her forehead against the glass sat there in moody silence. The stockings lay in her lap, and presently she unrolled and looked at them. As she did so the remembrance of the many hours of play she had sacrificed to them, the happy anticipation with which she had laboured on them, and all for no good, all vain and useless, overcame her, and she could not see them for her tears. Wasted work! Poor little Lydia, older hearts than hers have ached with bitterness over wasted work, and her child's heart ached with this its disappointment. She had intended to do Mark such a notable service, and had done him after all no service whatever! She had sacrificed all her leisure with such delight to give him pleasure, and he

would most likely say as her companions had said, "What a pity you wasted your time over such things, they weren't worth it." A cold cheerless feeling came over her, a wish she could have all those sunny evenings she had wasted back again. The stockings were hateful to her. She felt ashamed of them, she would rather Sister Ruth did not see them, for she could not bear the idea of a repetition of that, to her, odious remark, "what a pity you wasted your time on such things as these."

Full of these dismal reflections the little girl slid from the window-seat with the intention of putting the stockings out of sight, when Sister Mabel entered, and the good-natured Carrie fancying she owed Lydia some reparation for not having hindered her from, as she considered it, fruitless playtime labour, called out cheerily, "Oh, Sister, I must show you Lydia's darning, you never saw such a sight in your life."

Lydia shrank from these last words, she thought there was ridicule in them, and she could not bear ridicule on this subject; nevertheless she allowed Carrie to take the stockings from her hand and unfold them for Sister Mabel's inspection.

"Did you do this, my dear?" asked the Sister surprised.

"Carrie showed me how, Sister," replied the child sadly.

"Oh, I only showed her how to begin, Sister, the first evening she had them. She has put in every stitch herself," said Carrie eagerly.

"When did you do this, and why, my little girl?"

Lydia looked down and her lip quivered, but she did not answer lest she should cry. "Sister thinks it wasted work too," thought she. Carrie answered for her.

"Sister, they are her brother's. She has been working at them all her recreation time for I don't know how long. It's a pity she's wasted so much time on them, isn't it, Sister? for they really weren't worth mending, but I ought to have told her so. It's my fault, Lydia," she added, quite mistaking the cause of Lydia's depression.

"Yes, if he'd only given her a better pair to mend for him there'd have been some sense in it," said Miriam.

"He gave them me because I asked for them," cried Lydia, jealous of everything that seemed a reflection on her brother, "and I asked for the very oldest pair he'd got, because—because—" But here she broke down altogether.

Sister Mabel drew her to her side and finished the sentence. "Because you thought that would be doing him the greatest service; and the more work they afforded you, the better you would *like it*, because it was all for him."

"Yes, Sister," said the little girl, her surprise at the Sister's ready interpretation of her feelings checking her tears.

"I understand your motive perfectly, my child, and think it does you infinite credit; but I must confess I do not understand why, when your little labour of love is finished, and I must say so very well done, you should look so forlorn and even cry about it."

"Because, Sister," sobbed Lydia, her grief bursting forth afresh, "because I worked so hard, and it's all wasted work, every one says the stockings were not worth it."

"No more they were," said Rose who had come out of the swing. "I can't see anything to cry about, but it was a waste of recreation time to be stitching away at horrid old rags, for they were that; wasn't it, Sister? for when stockings get to a certain pitch they aren't worth mending, are they, Sister? I remember Sister Ruth taking a pair once from me, and saying, 'These are really now not worth the time and cotton they'd take to mend;' and oh, Sister, you can't think the weary time Lydia has been over these miserable stockings, and see the quantities of cotton she's used! she might have knitted a new pair in half the time and I'd have shown her how."

"Gently, my dear," said Sister Mabel in reply to Rose's volubility, "I know nothing of the pair of stockings Sister Ruth took from you as not worth mending, or how they came to such a sad pass."

"They were Annie Thornton's," explained Carrie, "those she came in with, Sister; Sister Ruth thought she might as well wear them till the new stockings were given out all round."

"Well," said Sister Mabel, "those stockings can bear no comparison with these. And as to whether these were or were not, considered merely as stockings, worth mending, I will not pretend to say, but of one thing I am certain, and that is, that whether they were worth Lydia's trouble or not, her brother Mark, from all I have heard, certainly was."

Lydia looked up hopefully. Sister Mabel drew a stocking on each hand and looked them carefully all over. They certainly were a curiosity of mending. There was scarcely an inch of space that was not completely covered with most careful and elaborate darns. Rose's observation that she saw Lydia's darns but no stockings seemed justifiable.

"Now I'll tell you what I think of these stockings," pursued Sister Mabel, "I think that they will keep Mark's feet warmer than any stockings he ever had before."

"Really!" "Do you think so, Sister?" "Are darned stockings

warmer than any others, Sister?" simultaneously exclaimed the young by-standers.

"Ah, because the darns have made the stockings twice the thickness they were before; that's what you mean, isn't it, Sister?" asked that teasing Rose.

"No, Rose, that is not what I mean at all. Neither do I know that darned stockings are as a rule warmer than new; but I mean that these will be warmer to Mark's feet than the thickest and warmest stockings that ever were woven, because—" she paused and looked round on the expectant faces of her little audience with one of her brightest smiles, "because they have not been mended with an ordinary needle, nor with common darning-cotton."

A general sensation followed this announcement, and several children, Miriam and Rose especially, were anxious to examine Lydia's work a little closer.

Lydia herself was quite amazed, and so was Carrie, who had purveyed the necessary materials.

"They were out of the store-box, Sister," said the latter, "I think they're exactly the same as we always use."

"Sister Ruth let Carrie buy them for me, Sister, out of the store-box, and I am going to ask Mark for some money to pay her back again next time he comes," explained Lydia with a sigh, as she asked herself how she could have the face to ask Mark to pay for such a superfluous and unnecessary outlay of cotton, more especially if, without knowing it, she had been using something of extra quality and therefore more expensive.

"All that may be," replied Sister Mabel, "still I adhere to my former opinion. Not a thread in all this mass of elaborate darning is of common cotton, but, listen, Rose, a fibre of pure unselfish love drawn from a tender grateful heart; and the needle that carried those threads was a steadfast self-denying will."

Rose clapped her hands and laughed, and the other children smiled kindly on their little companion: while Lydia with a sudden start of joy, utterly ignoring all proprieties, threw herself into the Sister's arms and hid her face upon her bosom. Sister Mabel's eyes glistened as she pressed the motherless child to her heart, and a link was riveted between those two that nothing could ever after dis sever. From that moment Lydia felt there was one at least who could understand and sympathise with the yearnings of her childish affection. She was understood, and peace and confidence followed upon the happy conviction.

She could not stay her tears, however, and sobbed with her arms round the Sister's neck to Rose's great concern, who kept

repeating, "Don't cry, Lydia, pray don't cry; indeed I didn't mean to tease you."

"But you see, Rose, you did tease without meaning it, you want more 'recollection,'" Sister Mabel's eyes sought Charlotte's as she pronounced this last word. "Now let us go on about these stockings, for I have something more to say about them. So far from this being 'wasted work,' I venture to say that it is as profitable and successful work as any fingers ever undertook. I said I believed these stockings would be warmer to Mark's feet than the best and thickest money could buy, and I say it again. I believe that when they are on, the warmth of all these interwoven threads of love will prevent Mark ever suffering from frost and cold, they will send the blood thrilling and bounding through his veins with the thought that there is one loving heart at least in this world, that thinks nothing a trouble, but everything a pleasure it does for him."

The clinging arms round Sister Mabel's neck clung closer still.

"I believe too that when they are on he will never be footsore or weary; that after a heavy day's work these magic threads will press with loving support round his ancles, and remind him by their gentle pressure that the little sister for whom he has toiled and laboured cherishes his love in her heart of hearts and would repay it by every precious little sacrifice within her power."

"Dear Sister, how very nice, I never thought of that," said Carrie; and the tears stood in Rose's bright eyes.

"My little girl," continued the Sister to the latter, "remember this. Work undertaken in unselfish love, to repay affection which has been bestowed upon us, is never wasted—it never can be wasted—for it is sanctified by the blessing of Him whose Name is Love."

Lydia with her face hidden still on the Sister's shoulder felt herself in a very dream of happiness.

"And not only is this not wasted work as respects Mark, but it is work that does, and will give pleasure—ay, very great pleasure—to others beside Mark. It has already given very great pleasure to me. It makes me very happy to think that my little Lydia has a loving grateful heart, and so much perseverance and industry, and that she is happy in giving up her own amusements to afford pleasure to others, at the cost of much trouble, and some sacrifice, to herself; all this the darning-cotton, which I told you was no common cotton, is telling me through the tips of my fingers, as I hold these stockings on my hand; and now it is whispering all up my arm that Lydia is honestly ambitious too, that she wishes to

improve as much as possible in her needlework,—and that for the very best and most blessed of reasons—that she may please those who love her.”

There was a movement now of the little brown head, and a soft kiss was pressed on Sister Mabel's cheek.

“Then the cotton has a message for Sister Ruth. It will tell her that her pains have not been thrown away, which is a very pleasant thing for a teacher; but that her little pupil has lovingly followed all her instructions, and is anxious to turn them to the very best advantage. I am quite certain that the darning-cotton's message to Sister Ruth will give her very great pleasure indeed.”

Several of the children had gathered quietly round while Sister Mabel was speaking, and they looked with a sort of wondering respect on the hitherto despised stockings, which had called forth such high encomiums from the Sister, but next to Lydia the one who listened with the greatest pleasure was the lame monitor, Martha. Her pale face lighted up with pleasure, for she was at that very time, secretly engaged in a choice specimen of needlework for her ‘lady;’ the kind friend who had transplanted her from the workhouse, and she drank in all Sister Mabel's remarks as equally applicable to herself.

It was delightful to see Lydia's face when at last the Sister with a motherly kiss lifted her from her lap and rose to go. It was a very rosebud of a face, so rosy with happiness though still dewy with tears. She held out her hands shyly for the now precious stockings, but Sister Mabel rolled them up and put them in her pocket. “You must let me keep these till to-morrow morning,” she said, “I want to show them myself to Sister Ruth.”

Favoured stockings! Lydia was highly sensible of the honour done them, and curtsied her way out into the playground, a very different Lydia to what she had been an hour ago. At the door of the schoolroom leading to the cloister Sister Mabel was stopped by Rose, looking rather rueful.

“Sister, I did not mean to vex Lydia, but I'm afraid I really did tease her.”

“Do you think that blessed Mary, the Mother of Fair Love, when she was a little girl would have spoken scornfully of anything a companion had done in the love of her heart to please one very near and dear to her, even supposing she had been mistaken in her undertaking? Not that Lydia was. All I have said I say again respecting Lydia's work.”

Rose looked still more rueful. “I did not think, Sister.”

“I wish you would think a little more, Rose, sometimes; I

should be very sorry to see you less merry, but I do wish when a teasing fit comes over you, you would be more—”

“Oh, I know what you are going to say, Sister, more recollected; Charlotte says that you told her that didn’t mean grave, as we fancied, and which we shouldn’t like at all, Sister dear, but—”

“But,” interrupted Sister Mabel, smiling, “merely that in a case like this, you should ‘recollect’ how pained and grieved you would have been had you been doing your best to give pleasure to some one you loved, and your work had been despised and ridiculed.”

“It was very nasty of me, I do think,” said Rose candidly, “but then, Sister, perhaps I didn’t think so much about it, because you see I have no one—no relations I mean—to love me, and for me to please.” She lifted her bright face to the Sister’s with an almost sad expression.

“But though you have no relations,” replied the Sister, tenderly stroking her hair, “I don’t think you can complain you are a bankrupt in love, Rose? I think I know more than one or two persons here at St. Mary’s who love my girl, and whom I think, she does very often—I may say generally—try very much to please, always excepting those times, of course,” she added smiling, “when she does not ‘recollect.’”

It was now Rose’s turn to tender a loving kiss to the Sister as Lydia had done before; and then she flew into the playground the gayest of the gay, as Lydia may have been said, that same evening, to have been the happiest of the happy.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT CAME OF THEM.

CERTAINLY Sister Mabel meant to show Lydia’s darning to Sister Ruth, or she would not have said so; but as certainly she was not thinking of Sister Ruth when she left the schoolroom, and took her way down the long cloister till she came to the common room.

It was the Sisters’ recreation time, but only two or three who feared the evening air were there; the fineness of the weather had tempted all the rest into the garden. Thither Sister Mabel followed them, seeking, apparently, one particular person. Failing in her search,

she re-entered the house, and gave two slow distinct raps at the door of the Superior's room. The heads of the different departments of the Sisterhood of St. Mary and St. John seeking the Mother Superior in her private room were known by their distinctive raps. Thus the Sisters of the 'Mother House' knocked once; of St. Mary's and St. Joseph's twice; of St. Barnabas', three times; and of St. Luke's, four. Sister Mabel's two taps receiving an instant response, she entered. The Superior was seated at her writing table, leaning back in her chair, and talking to a Sister whose sweet, grave face might have been chiselled in marble, for the exquisite regularity of its features. The expression of her delicate mouth and finely rounded chin would have been stern but for the counter-acting gentleness of her soft, blue eyes. She was half sitting, half leaning on the window sill, conversing in low, earnest tones with the Superior.

"You are engaged, my Mother," said Sister Mabel, hesitating at the door.

"Not so, my dear," replied the Superior. "Sister Christine and I have been breaking rules and doing business in recreation time; but we have just finished, and are on our way to make *amende honorable* in the garden. Are you meditating a breach of rule too?" she asked smiling. "Stockings! you are not going to have the face to ask for new stockings for the children? Why, they have only just had them all round. But whether or no, you must wait till to-morrow, my Sister."

Sister Mabel laughed a low musical laugh, and dropping on her knees before the Superior, folded her arms across her lap to prevent her rising.

"I want no stockings, my Mother," she said; "and my business is quite legitimate. I have had a great pleasure, a very great pleasure, and you know what a baby I am, I must always share it, I can never content myself with it alone." Here she darted a slightly appealing, deprecating glance at Sister Christine.

"Shall I go?" said the latter, moving from the window.

"Oh dear, no, Sister, pray don't, or I shall immediately feel I am breaking rule, by keeping the Mother to a *tête-à-tête* in recreation time."

Sister Christine smiled, and sat down again on the window-seat, while Sister Mabel narrated to the Superior the tale of little Lydia's love to her brother, her little scheme to make herself useful to him, and described the affectionate child's persevering labour hour after hour during the sweet summer evenings when all her companions were merrily at play.

If Sister Mabel had counted on the Superior's sympathy, she

certainly had not counted in vain; the Mother listened with manifest interest; and with such occasional comments as "That is very nice," "Ah! that is hopeful," &c.; but Sister Christine slightly raised her beautiful eyebrows, and seemed at a loss to understand the special interest of Sister Mabel's communication. It was not quite finished when a knock, belonging to none of the "departments,"—a quiet, decided rap—was heard at the door, and the person who knocked, waiting for no response, entered too quickly for Sister Mabel to recover herself from her kneeling position at the Mother Superior's feet.

"Sister Mabel darning stockings on her knees by way of penance!" said the new-comer, in a loud, cheery voice.

Sister Mabel did not now attempt to alter her position. She only laughed, and said, "Not so, my Father, but I am putting the Mother to penance with one of my long 'yarns.'"

"Tell him," said the Superior, nodding to Sister Mabel, then added to Mr. Neville, "Sister Mabel thinks she has found a swan's egg in her duck's nest, and she is so elated that she must needs keep me from recreation, and involve me in a breach of rule, to hear all about it."

"Indeed," replied the Chaplain; "well, let me hear it too." He drew a chair near the little group and sat down.

Mr. Neville had been the Chaplain of St. Mary's for many years, and had grown old in its service. His hair was snowy white, his once tall stature now bent by weight of years, and his face lined with thought and care, that care which falls so heavily on those who are deeply engaged in the Church's warfare. But neither age nor care had dimmed the brightness, keenness, and animation of his clear dark eyes, or marred the kindliness of his pleasant smile, or imparted the least trace of sharpness to the tone of his cheery voice. The very sight of him inspired confidence, and there was a true, hearty, English manliness about him which gave assurance that whatever he undertook would be well considered, wisely planned, and steadily carried out; that all double motives, vacillations, narrowness, and meanness, were impossible to him. The Chaplain's house adjoined the convalescent hospital, and there he lived with his wife and youngest daughter, a pretty, blooming girl of fifteen. His only son had been suddenly cut off in the midst of a career of unusual promise, with academic honours thick upon him, and this blow had for a time almost prostrated the loving-hearted old man, but the very intensity of the love which caused his heart to stoop so low, gave it energy to rise with fresh strength, re-vivified, re-purified from the furnace of affliction, to give, with fresh power, that comfort to other stricken hearts with which he himself had

been "comforted of God." His two eldest daughters were married, and had families of their own, but the special mission of the youngest, Mary Neville, seemed to be attendance on her father, and now invalid mother, and the discharge, as far as she was able, of the various duties by which the latter, as long as her health permitted, had assisted her husband in his ministerial labours. Mary Neville was at once the housekeeper of the Chaplain's house, her mother's constant attendant, her father's companion, messenger, amanuensis, and "general fag," as she herself termed it, and a privileged visitor in all departments of St. Mary's.

"Let me hear about Sister Mabel's swan's egg," said Mr. Neville, seating himself in an attitude of attention; and the Sister repeated her history of Mark's stockings with increased animation. Sister Christine watched the expressive faces of the speaker and her audience with evident surprise, which redoubled when the Chaplain took the stockings from Sister Mabel, drew them upon his hands as she had done before, and examined them with as much apparent interest as if they had been the costliest specimens of Church embroidery.

"What is Sister Christine thinking?" asked Mr. Neville, observing her.

Sister Christine coloured, and replied in some confusion, "I was thinking, Father, that it seemed a pity that Sister Mabel had not taken this opportunity of raising the child's mind to a higher and more spiritual affection."

"Ah! and how do you propose that she should have done this?"

"Might she not, Father," replied Sister Christine diffidently, "have taken advantage of the evidently affectionate and self-denying disposition of this child to represent to her that love bestowed upon earthly objects is wasted, that all such objects must perish, that the love of creatures keeps down the soul to earth, that we must love the Imperishable only."

"You mean that Mark's feet being perishable, and his stockings more perishable still, it was a waste of Lydia's love and Lydia's labour to bestow any time upon them?"

The old man's eyes were fixed keenly on the varying countenance of the Sister. She hardly understood the bantering sound of his words, and looked disconcerted. "I meant that carnal affections are a snare," she answered softly; "surely, my Father, we are taught to detach ourselves from all created objects, that only as we detach ourselves from creatures do we advance in the Spiritual life?"

"Granted, my daughter, but let us first ascertain clearly what are carnal affections, and what is meant by 'created objects;' *because it appears to me that a carnal affection which manifests itself*

In the mending of old clothes, is not to be discouraged by persons of small means; and being myself a 'created object,' I must confess myself anxious to know how far it is necessary that persons should 'detach' themselves from me. Nothing I desire more than that my children and grandchildren should advance in the Spiritual life, yet I must own that I should be sorry to see my Mary 'detached' from me; she makes her mother's gowns, and sews the buttons on my shirts very neatly."

Sister Mabel rested her cheek upon her left hand to hide the smile she could not repress; Sister Christine felt secretly annoyed, but had too much respect for Mr. Neville, and too much command over herself, to show it. The Superior looked from one to the other, half amused, half wondering.

"What are carnal affections?" asked the Chaplain.

"Affections which are merely natural," replied Sister Christine, "and, if Sister Mabel will excuse me, I must say I was perplexed to know why she should seem to think that this little Lydia had achieved something extraordinary by a display of mere natural affection. The child's *perseverance* was commendable in performing a self-imposed and, to a child, disagreeable task, but her love for her brother was something simply natural, a heathen might have as much."

"Affections, then, that are not carnal, are *unnatural*?"

"Sir!"

"You said, my dear, that carnal affections are natural affections; I repeat, then, if we would not have our affections carnal they must be unnatural."

"My love," interposed the Superior, "is it possible that you do not understand the meaning of the word 'carnal'?"

Sister Christine hesitated.

"It means 'of the flesh,' my child; all mere *selfish* affections,—affections that never lead to anything high or noble; affections all really centring in self, morbid, unhealthy affections, those are carnal. Till we are detached from such as these, advance in the Spiritual life is indeed impossible."

Sister Christine looked only half convinced.

"As the Father observed just now, 'a love which manifests itself by mending old clothes for the beloved object,'" the Superior continued smiling, "and that at the sacrifice of its own pleasure, is the very reverse of carnal. And I think it was the entire absence of any *carnality* (I don't know whether there is such a word) in this little girl's affection for her brother which gave Sister Mabel so much pleasure."

"I suppose, my Mother, we might really sum up the matter

thus," said Sister Mabel: "Affections that are selfish are carnal; unselfish affections are spiritual."

"Precisely so," replied Mr. Neville.

"Oh, surely," exclaimed Sister Christine, "that can scarcely be correct. Why, at that rate the mere natural affection, (I must use the word *natural*, Father) the inborn affection, I mean, of parents for their children, or of brothers and sisters, would become religion!"

"Natural affection, yes; animal affection, no," replied Mr. Neville. "Do not confuse these two things, my daughter. Natural affections are those which God has not only imparted, but commanded; the developement of Himself within the human heart; the means by which we may rise out of all that is low, mean, earthly, sensual. Animal affections are *instinct*, which we share in common with cats and dogs, pigs and sheep, partridges and tomtits. We shall never rise higher by these. Natural affection is a manifestation of the Divine life in the baptized; where it exists among those who are not members of CHRIST, it is a remnant of holiness saved from the fall."

"Where it exists, Father?" repeated Sister Christine, in surprise, "do you mean that natural affection is not found even among savages?"

"You have again confused 'natural' with 'animal,' Christine; natural affection, affection, that is, flowing in the channels appointed by God, and in the manner He Himself approves, is a much rarer thing than you imagine, even amongst parents and children. Half the women in the world—Christian women, too—love their children merely as cats love their kittens, and cows love their calves. The woman that fondles and pampers her baby, as a fine lady pampers her lapdog; and then, when the child, with all the inborn evil of its nature, called out by her, grows up strong to go its own way, resists it, and is in constant warfare with it, in what is she better than the cat who would defend her kitten against all comers, and pamper it with the finest mice she can catch, but yet when it is grown a cat of equal size, will fight and spit and scratch with it? The Apostle predicts that in the latter days there shall be, as a sign of 'perilous times,' an absence of 'natural affection.' 'Men,' he says, 'shall be lovers of their own selves,' and, as a consequence, 'without natural affection.' He is predicting a decay of *religion*. For, remember, my daughter, we have it on the highest authority that religion and *love* are synonymous. 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one towards another.' God is Love: and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.' 'He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is Love.'"

Sister Christine did not immediately answer, so the Chaplain

continued, "You were surprised that Sister Mabel exulted in the circumstance that one of her children, of her own free will, at the loving promptings of her own heart, conceived the idea of returning her brother's care and love for her by making herself useful to him, and counted self-denial no sacrifice, being, seemingly, unconscious she was denying herself any present pleasure, so great was her delight in this little offering of grateful love. I think Sister Mabel was looking forward to the time when the child's love should rise and expand, higher and broader, growing upwards from the 'brother whom she has seen,' to that Elder Brother whom she has not seen; when she should begin to think how she could do something to return *His* love and care, and count no self-denial in *His* service a sacrifice because of the great delight it would afford her to be doing something, however trifling, for one who had so greatly loved her. Was it not so, my daughter?"

Sister Mabel assented.

"But, Father, that is what I mean," said Sister Christine earnestly, "the child should be taught to raise her affections higher."

"You might as well say the young new-fledged nestling should be 'taught' to fly as strongly and swiftly as the parent bird. If the little thing can fly at all, well and good; you cannot *teach* it strength."

"But you can teach a child to love God," urged Sister Christine.

"You cannot teach a child to love the Unseen except by St. John's method, namely, by love of the *seen*. My dear, if you were to attempt to make a child religious without first drawing out its natural affection, you would turn out either a little sentimental simpleton, or an accomplished little hypocrite. Most likely the latter. A child without natural affection—*natural*, mind, not animal—is a child without religion. On the other hand, a loving-hearted child is a *religious* child, the more loving the more saintly. There, Sister Mabel," added Mr. Neville, throwing the stockings to her, "I have no hesitation in saying that your little Lydia is an embryo saint."

"You are not serious, Father?" exclaimed Sister Christine in a tone of amazement.

"Indeed I am, my dear."

"I hope you will not think me disrespectful, Father," said Sister Christine, colouring, "if I were to say—"

"Say anything you like."

"Well, then, it seems to me so puerile, almost like making a jest of religion to attach such importance to this girl's single act of darning a pair of stockings for her brother."

"How puerile it was to attach importance to the widow's mite. Yet One said whose word cannot be disputed, 'Of a truth, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.'"

"But that was an offering to God," returned Sister Christine quickly.

"So is this," said Mr. Neville, touching the stockings.

"Father, how can that be? the child had not a thought beyond her brother."

"Because her love had not sufficient strength to fly further; but she has tried her wings and made her first flight towards God. At present she is unconsciously worshipping God under the form of her brother."

"But that is idolatry!"

"Not at all, my dear; by loving the brother whom she has seen she is training her young heart to love Him whom she has not seen. St. John tells us that this first step is imperatively necessary; that we must rise to love the Creator by first loving His creatures. A child that dearly loves, unselfishly loves, a parent, will be prepared to love with true devotion our FATHER which is in Heaven, or if the love is towards a brother or sister, will naturally turn to the First-Born among many brethren; or if towards a friend—to the 'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.'"

"I thought love must always centre first in God," murmured Sister Christine.

"It cannot, my child, till it has first risen to God: and it must rise by degrees. Love rises from the human heart as mists rise from the earth. They are drawn by the sun's power towards the sun; and as they ascend they gather and cling round earthly objects, rising higher and higher the nearer they approach the sun, till at last they are lifted to the very mountain top. Then they return in life-giving showers to the thirsty earth. Selfish love that never rises to God can never return from God to help mankind! it is like the mist that clings and broods over the earth, a miasma, an unhealthy fog. But a love that manifests itself by doing what it can to the best of its, may be feeble, perceptions will never be thus, but will always resemble the evening dew creeping up and up the mountain side, bathing plant and tree in refreshing coolness as for a time it clings to them, but always rising higher all the while till it has reached its highest elevation. The sun has drawn it then as high as it can reach, but not to keep it away from the objects from which it has risen, but to send it back to them in the more perfect form of showers of rain."

Sister Mabel smiled at the Father's simile, "Or we might use

the poet's illustration," she said, a soft flush mantling in her cheek :

" 'God gives us love. Something to love
He lends us ; but, when love is grown
To ripeness, that on which it throve
Falls off, and love is left alone.' "

"An apt quotation, my daughter. Has Sister Christine any more objections?"

"One more, my Father," replied the Sister smiling. "Can any work be considered an offering if we take pleasure in it?"

"It would be no offering if we did not take pleasure in it. Nothing is accepted that is not of free will, and a free will offering implies something in which we take pleasure."

"Ah, you misunderstand me, Sir; I can understand service towards our fellow-creatures being an offering if it be something repulsive to our nature, or done to some one for whom we feel no affection. When we do violence to ourselves to serve another I can understand the thing done being an offering. But when we are merely following our affections, and when the thing which we do is pleasurable to ourselves,—” Sister Christine did not finish her sentence, but looked inquiringly towards the Chaplain.

"If we do a service to another because it gives us a selfish gratification, certainly that is no offering to any one but ourselves. If we do service to another simply because it is distasteful, and repulsive, and a violence done to our nature, that is not an offering either, or an offering only to our spiritual pride, the most hateful, because the most deadly, of all pride. God will accept no offering but that of love, and to love nothing is repulsive but sin. I will give you an illustration," continued Mr. Neville, observing a look of doubt in Sister Christine's eyes. "Suppose a child in attendance on the sick-bed of a beloved parent for whom something must be done repugnant to the natural feelings. Do you think that child would be conscious of any repugnance? I think the loving heart would exult and find pleasure in its labour of love, because the greater the difficulty, the greater the proof it could afford of its love and self-devotion."

"Still, Father, the heart would be simply following its affection."

"My dear, if we would serve Him acceptably whose name is Love, we must be careful always to follow our affections. He will not admit us into His presence if love be not the usher. I can imagine no service more disgusting to Him than the loveless service of pride, which says, 'I do this merely as a violence to my

nature. It is the most unpleasant thing I can find to do, and the person for whom I do it is an object of dislike to me or of utter indifference.' And so pride would make GOD a debtor! Is such service as that an offering? It seems to me the most grievous insult we worms of earth can offer to the Divine Majesty."

"But, Father, (you must not think me very obstinate) I cannot quite accept as an illustration the child nursing a beloved parent. How do you account for the devoted service of the saints to persons who, we know, must have been, if not objects of dislike to them, at least of entire indifference?"

Sister Mabel here made a slight movement as if about to answer, but checked herself; the Superior, however, raised herself quickly in her chair and before Mr. Neville could reply, answered earnestly, "Oh, my child, you must indeed have missed the key to the lives of all the saints if you do not perceive that their master-spring was love, and love alone. Why did they perform acts of devoted service towards persons distasteful or indifferent to them? Because in each such person they saw the Crucified, their Elder Brother, the Father of their spirits, the Husband of their souls; Him whose sacrifice for them had been so tremendous that nothing in their power to offer could ever be anything but paltry and worthless; and yet, in acknowledgment of whose love, they must ever be pouring themselves out in self-sacrifice to the utmost limit of their ability, self-sacrifice which was their joy, their privilege, their great delight. Because they could not climb His cross and wipe the death-dews from His brow, or bathe His gaping wounds, or unbind the crown of thorns, or rest that agonised head upon their bosoms, or wash and entomb that sacred body, and love must find some way of ministering, and He had said, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'" The Superior's pale face was flushed, her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, and voice and hand trembled with emotion as she added, "Oh, children, this, and this only, is the secret of true service. The act passes on from the object who immediately receives it, to Him for whose sake it has been done. The helpless, friendless child becomes the Child of Bethlehem; the homeless wanderer He who had nowhere to lay His head; the agonised spirit, the LORD in Gethsemane; the afflicted creature repulsive to human sight in its sufferings, He 'whose visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men!' the lifeless body, the LORD in Joseph's tomb."

"Even so, my Mother," replied Sister Christine, "but after all you agree with me; the love must not rest on the visible object, but *rise on and beyond.*"

"It must already have risen," interposed Mr. Neville, "it must already have ascended to the Source of Love, and must also have descended again from Him. Love must not rest on a visible object in the act of ascending, but when it descends again from Him, it must dwell on the object on which it has descended, or you would make all religious service a mere waking dream. Love that has first ascended and centred itself in CHRIST, and then flows down from Him a living stream, sees in each soul for which CHRIST died, either a fellow-member with itself in CHRIST, or one to be added as a member. It will have all to know their blessedness in Him, it would comfort them with the comfort it has itself received from GOD; it yearns over them with the love of CHRIST; it sympathises with them with His sympathy; pities them with His pity; seeks them with His care; joys over them with His joy. It has become so identified with CHRIST that it becomes as CHRIST, and we know His love 'rests' upon His creatures with the most tender pity, with the most perfect sympathy."

Mr. Neville rose, and they all rose also. "Just one word more, dear Father," said Sister Christine. "Is there not danger of our becoming mere philanthropists?"

"The love which has first risen to, and then descended from CHRIST, can never become mere philanthropy, any more than the love which brought our blessed LORD from Heaven was mere philanthropy. A mere philanthropist is one whose love in rising has stopped half way, and beginning by being a refreshing dew has ended in becoming a damp unpleasant fog. Mere philanthropy may be known by its invariably sounding a trumpet before itself, calling on all the world to notice and watch its work, making the praise of men a *sine qua non* for its perseverance, its own convenience and satisfaction the term of its continuance, and always shuffling off anything unpleasant in its duties on others, keeping all the laurels for itself."

"Are you going, Father? are you in a hurry?" said the Superior, "I wanted to ask you if you had looked over that statement of expenses."

Mr. Neville struck one hand upon the other. "Was not the object for which I came here this evening, to give it back to you corrected? and Sister Christine has so completely talked it out of my recollection, that I was carrying it away again in my pocket." He took out some papers and handed them to the Superior, saying with a smile, "I would make Christine write the fair copy as a penance for having kept us all from recreation."

"I think I ought to bear the penance, Father, for I was the

original delinquent," said Sister Mabel, "it has all come of my having introduced Mark's stockings."

"Ah, those stockings, by the way, that reminds me. I was going to ask you what sort of a fellow is this young man, this Mark?"

"Oh, a man after your own heart, Father, a brave, burly blacksmith; an honest, straightforward English artisan, full of English perseverance, and English pluck."

"You are in love with him, evidently."

"He has dubbed himself my son," said Sister Mabel, smiling at the recollection.

"Indeed! well I should like to make his acquaintance. Next visiting day after he has seen his sister, send him down to my house."

"Oh, he had better come before," said Sister Mabel; and she explained how she had given him leave to come to morning service.

"That was a happy thought of yours, my dear. Well, send him to me at his convenience. Good evening." The Chaplain had shaken hands with them and left the room, when he returned to say to Sister Mabel, "How is that poor unhappy child Isabella getting on?"

"Only indifferently, Father," sighed Sister Mabel.

"You will be sorry one day you rejected my counsels and refused to get rid of her."

"Oh, Father, you promised I might keep her a little longer," said Sister Mabel in alarm.

"Well, well, I only say you will be sorry. One diseased sheep may taint a whole flock."

"She may amend even yet," pleaded the Sister, "sometimes I think I see signs of good in her."

"Humph! does she love anybody yet?"

"No one, I fear, Sir."

"Then at present there is no hope. Mark that, Christine. You know the child of whom we speak. If I could hear that she had conceived an affection for any one creature beside herself I should hail it as a step towards religion."

He nodded and departed. Sister Mabel went up to the Mother, and kissed her. "You will stand my friend, Mother, my friend and Isabella's; you will let her have another fair chance?"

"My dear, I have promised; but I sometimes doubt if I was wise."

"Mother, I will take all the responsibility on myself, I hope so *strongly still.*"

"It shall be as you wish, my dear daughter; but I pray God you may not find yourself woefully mistaken."

Sister Mabel thanked her with another kiss, and slipping the stockings into her pocket went in search of Sister Ruth, who returned them next day to the little darning, with such kind words of approval that the child's innocent happiness was, if possible, redoubled.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT MARK DID WITH THEM.

THE great day, the 8th of September, was now fast approaching, and every child at St. Mary's was full of eager anticipation.

But to Lydia the greatest event in prospect was Mark's next visit, which would take place some two or three days before the general holiday. Meantime she carried the stockings in her pocket by day, and placed them under her pillow at night. They seemed to her a link between herself and her absent brother, a something which drew them together.

But when the long-expected Sunday arrived, her hopes drooped a little. Perhaps Mark would not think much about them. And then she would have to ask him for some pence to defray the cost of the cotton, and he might consider she had been extravagant. She forgot all her misgivings, however, when she entered the chapel with her companions, and saw Mark standing in his place with a grin of happiness upon his countenance. She could not help listening now and then to detect, if possible, the sound of his voice in the responses and hymns, and greatly she longed to turn and look at him, but that would not do, she knew. So she was fain to content herself with the knowledge that he was there.

She was the very first to be called out to 'Visitors' that afternoon, and then her misgivings about Mark's reception of the stockings became greater than ever. No other visitors had as yet arrived, so they had the long cloister all to themselves. Mark was in great spirits, but Lydia was somewhat abstracted, for the stockings were yet on her mind.

"Well, what do you think's happened now," said Mark, "this here blessed day of all days in the year?"

"I don't know, indeed," replied Lydia, "what?"

"Perhaps you can guess."

"Indeed I can't, do tell me."

"Well, then, that old gentleman, the parson, you know, him with the white hair, he sends for me after church, and, says he, 'Mark,' says he, 'I believe that's your name,' says he. And I says, 'It is, Sir,' says I. 'Well,' says he, 'it's a long way to walk to church, all the way from Lowton,' says he. And I says, 'I don't make no count at all of the distance, Sir,' says I, 'for I'd walk double the distance any day or night to see my little sister,' I says—" Here Mark gave Lydia a great hug, and she responded with a hearty kiss. "'And likewise,' says I, 'for to hear them orphan children sing, which is right beautiful,' I says. 'Well,' says he, 'if so be that you like it, you can come over to service here any Sunday you like, only you mustn't expect for to see your sister except on the proper days, as that would create jealousies and what not amongst the others,' says he."

"Mark!" Lydia broke in with, "did Mr. Neville really say that you might come to service here *every* Sunday if you liked?"

"Ay, that he did, lass," replied Mark, "and that's not all, for he says, 'Where do you eat your victuals?' says he. 'On the heath, Sir,' says I. 'That may be all very well when the weather's dry and warm,' says he, 'but when it's not that, you come down here, and eat them under shelter.'"

Lydia clapped her hands. "Oh, Mark, how kind! And you will come every Sunday; and though of course you mustn't come here except visiting days, we shall both be in chapel together, and we shall be saying the same words, and singing the same hymns, and listening to the same sermon. Oh, I am so happy!"

"Yes, it's prime," said Mark, "and for it to come to-day of all days."

"Why to-day?"

"Ah, you don't remember, you're such a little one, but it's mother's birthday."

"Is it?" exclaimed Lydia, "oh, I wish I'd known it. I'd have kissed her picture this morning when I got up, and wished her many happy returns of the day."

"No fear of her not having them where she is," replied Mark. "But, Liddy, I'm going to give you a birthday present for her. See, here's a bright new shilling."

Lydia drew back a little. "Mark, I can't take your money," she said, and her eyes filled with tears, "the money you work so hard for, for me."

"Nonsense, lass, I like it; here, take hold."

"Not a whole shilling, Mark; but I do want a few pence; I've been buying something; it was for you," she added hastily.

"You shall have the pence, as many as ever you want; but what

can you have been buying for me? Don't you buy nothing for me, spend your money on yourself."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Lydia, "that I'll never do. But it was cotton, Mark, I bought."

"Cotton! for me!"

"Those stockings, Mark, don't you remember? I've been mending them; they are here." And she began slowly and somewhat reluctantly to draw them from her pocket.

Mark's roar of laughter made her wish she had said nothing about them. "Mend them stockings! nonsense, lass! they never could be mended. Don't you go for to waste no time over they. Why, I thought you were up to some games with them, so I picked out the very worst. You said you wanted the worst."

"So I did, I thought the worst would want mending most," said Lydia. It was, then, as she feared. She had, after all, wasted her time, and Mark's pennies.

"Let's see what sort of a botch you've made of them," said Mark good-humouredly, and he unrolled the stockings, and drew one of them on his hand. Man though he was, he could see they had become a completely wearable pair of stockings: not a hole, not a thin place was visible, and he could perceive that the work was neater than any he had ever seen in a stocking before.

"You never did this, Liddy?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"I did indeed," replied Lydia, still despondently.

"What, can they be the very rags I brought you?"

"Yes, the very same."

"And you did this, and for me?"

"Mark, I wanted so to do something useful for you."

"My darling!" here he kissed her. "But what ever did the ladies say to your working for me instead of for them?"

"Oh, I did it in my play hours," replied Lydia more checrily, for she now perceived her brother was more pleased than she had ever dared to hope.

"Your play hours!" He laid her head upon his shoulder, and his brown cheek upon it, and presently, to her consternation, she felt his warm tears falling upon her.

"Mark," said she fearfully, raising her head to look at him, "are you crying?"

"I'm a born fool, I think," returned Mark, with something between a laugh and a sob, "for I never was so glad before!"

"Oh, Mark!" and then they were both very quiet, and she lay in his arms in an ecstasy of childish happiness too deep for words.

It was strange how long they remained thus. Visitors came,

and visitors went, and the cloister was alive with merry voices, but the brother and sister said little more to each other that afternoon. Only Mark insisted on paying for the darning-cotton, and upon Lydia's acceptance of the bright shilling.

"And you'll bring me your other stockings, Mark, and let me mend them too?" asked Lydia anxiously.

Mark nodded; there was something in his throat which prevented his speaking. When at length the chapel-bell rang the warning for visitors to depart, the young man lifted the child on to the window-seat that her face might be close to his, and whispered, "I shall go to the afternoon service, Liddy. Somehow it makes one seem near mother. I shall go there to thank the good GOD. Liddy, I think He does all things well. Everything seems to be best for us, my maid."

After service, Sister Mabel, who was in her room, was aware of a radiant little face gazing wistfully at her through the open door. She beckoned, and Lydia came quickly to her side.

"Was he pleased?" asked the Sister, guessing the cause of the child's bright smiles.

"Sister, he said he'd never been so glad before."

"Ah, I thought so. And are not you 'glad,' my little girl, that you are such a happy, favoured child as to have it in your power to rejoice a heart that loves you?"

"Oh, Sister, so very glad!"

"Lydia, there is Another Who calls us His 'brothers' and 'sisters.' Do you know Who that is?"

"The LORD JESUS," replied the child reverently.

"And just as Mark was so 'glad' because his little sister had done her best to please him, so He, our Elder Brother, is 'glad' when we do our best to please Him. Will you remember this sometimes, Lydia?"

"Yes, Sister." Then, after a pause, the child said thoughtfully, "Sister, I do love Him."

"Whom, my love?"

"The LORD JESUS. And I think Mark loves Him too. Mark said he was going to chapel to thank Him—the good GOD; and he said he thought He did all things well."

"Ah, my child, if Mark has learnt that lesson, he is a happy man indeed."

"And, Sister, he said that going to chapel made him feel near mother; and he said that to-day was mother's birthday. And Sister, I want to ask you a favour, a very great favour," added the little girl coaxingly.

"Indeed, what may that be?"

"Sister, the grass has not been mown yet in the monitors' garden, and there are such lots of daisies there. May I gather some and make a little wreath, and then take it up into the dormitory, and hang it round mother's likeness, and give it a kiss, and wish her many happy returns of the day? For I did not know this morning when I got up it was her birthday."

"Certainly you may, my little girl. Here is the dormitory key. Lock the door when you leave it, and put the key back on this table."

Away ran Lydia, after curtsying her acknowledgments, but presently returned with a little shy knock at the door, to ask Sister Mabel if she knew that Mr. Neville had given Mark leave to come to service whenever he liked, and eat his dinner at his house.

No, Sister Mabel had not heard it, and she was pleased, greatly pleased. "But you must not let your brother's presence in chapel disturb your prayers, my little girl; rather you must pray the more heartily, that your prayers and his may go up together, and be accepted of our dear LORD, Who has promised, 'if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My FATHER, Which is in Heaven.'"

After tea Lydia retired to the monitors' garden; where, with the remains of the cotton, that was hers by purchase, she succeeded in making a very pretty daisy wreath, which she afterwards carried to the dormitory. The western sun shone in at the open window; the whole of the distant landscape was flooded with golden light. The child laid her wreath upon her bed, and thoughtfully took down her mother's likeness. She kissed it, and carrying it to the window, sat down on the sill and looked towards the brilliant sunset. Childish thoughts, yet deep, passed through her young mind. Here was her mother's likeness; and that from which the likeness had been taken was lying under the ground beneath the rank grass and thistles, and noxious weeds that defaced and defiled "God's Acre" at Lowton; but the mother herself was far away, living still, loving still, out there beyond the sunset. "How strange that seems," thought Lydia.

"Mother, I love you so," she whispered, kissing the little likeness, but turning her face as she spoke towards the glowing heavens. "Mother, I am so happy. I wish you many happy returns of the day, dear mother; and I'm going to do all I can to please you."

Then her young mind wandered away to the description she had been learning of that great company 'clad in white garments with palms in their hands,' and she wondered whether any of them were then among those rosy clouds, and whether that bright, golden light was really from the sun, or whether it was the "other side of

the sky;" and at last she rose, and arranging her little wreath tastefully round the likeness, kissed it, hung it up, and finally left the dormitory, thinking what a delightful thing it was that "after all, nobody was really dead!"

Meantime Mark carried his stockings back to Lowton with great pride and exultation, and Lydia would have been astonished indeed had she known that her handiwork was handed about from one to the other of her former acquaintance, discussed by them, and wondered over by them, till at length it actually reached the august hands of Mrs. Dean herself, who observed to her sister, Miss Green, that "certainly those Popish people at Kirkminster seemed to teach good needlework;" to which Miss Green replied that, "it was awful to think that it was taught at the expense of the learners' souls!"

Indeed, so great was the indignation of Mr. and Mrs. Dean against Mark for having taken his sister to St. Mary's, that they had forbidden his working anywhere about their house or grounds. But he cared little for this, or that his neighbours called him in derision the "Catholic;" though the day had not yet come when, the meaning of that word being explained to him, he discovered that their ignorant taunt was really the highest title of honour they could bestow upon him!

Such a practical matter as the darning of a pair of stockings was, however, more within the range of the understanding of the Lowton gossips than Kirkminster theology; and Lydia's work excited quite as much surprise and commendation as even Mark could desire. He had kept much aloof from his neighbours ever since Lydia's residence at St. Mary's, but now he went among them exulting, and they listened much more readily and kindly to his description of her happiness and improvement. Even Mrs. Pips began to doubt "whether them Sisters was altogether so bad as folks said."

On the Sunday evening succeeding the last visiting day, Mark was sitting smoking his pipe beside the hearth of a kind-hearted old woman who "washed and did for him;" and, better than all, so he thought, listened to all his tales about Lydia and St. Mary's with unwearied patience. Mrs. Goodwin was quite content that Lydia should bear her part in the mending of "them aggrawatin stockings," and had that very morning rolled up a pair for Mark to leave at the orphanage.

He had not long returned, and was now smoking meditatively by the fire which she had lighted to boil the kettle for his tea, when he said slowly, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "I say, Mother Goodwin."

"Yes, Mark," said the old woman.

Mark put his hand in his breast-pocket and pulled out a little parcel. He opened it carefully, and showed her that it contained the pair of stockings so often alluded to, neatly folded up with sprigs of lavender, and sweet-smelling herbs.

"I say, Mother Goodwin," he began again, "I want you for to make me a promise."

"Be it anything as I can do, Mark?" said the old woman, "for my eyes is not what they was, my lad, though I uses my specs."

"This don't need no specs," returned Mark. "All I want is his. If I should die afore you, Mother Goodwin—"

"Lawk, Mark!" interrupted Mrs. Goodwin, "what ever put such dismal notions in your head?"

"I don't know as they're dismal in particular," replied Mark, "young men do die, Mother Goodwin. There's that poor young fellow Brady, as likely as any to live, and an inflammation comes and carries him off, and here they buries him this very day."

"That was his lungs," observed Mrs. Goodwin. "And your lungs is as sound as brass, Mark."

"Very likely they be," retorted Mark, "but that's neither here nor there; what I want for to observe is this; supposing, then, as I should die at Lowton, and afore you, I want you to promise me that you'll see that whoever lays me out they'll put these stockings on my feet. I want to be buried in these here stockings, Mrs. Goodwin."

Mrs. Goodwin was so affected by this request, and at the very idea of Mark dying before her, that she could only rock herself to and fro in her chair, and murmur with her apron over her face, "Well-a-day! and who'd ever have thought it! and she wished Mark hadn't seen young Brady's funeral!"

But when Mark very earnestly reiterated his entreaty, and told her he was then going to put this, Lydia's first work for him, into his box, where, when the time came, she would find it, the kind-hearted creature came up to him and kissed him, assuring him that she would put the stockings on with her own hands, but that for all that, he'd see his grandchildren, ay, and his great-grandchildren too, "like old Master Burt, who's in his 88th, but who can see as well without his specs as I can with them; and as for that young Brady, there's no knowing what foolish things he mayn't have done to bring on his inflammation, so you keep up your heart, my dear, I shall see you married yet, and Lydia, too, and it's you will be seeing to the old woman's funeral, and not she to yours."

Mark smiled and nodded, and having put the little parcel into his box, returned to cheer Mrs. Goodwin with less "dismal notions."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE 8TH OF SEPTEMBER. THE EVE.

PREPARATION for the 8th of September began on the 6th. School was suspended. All such children as were voted "of no use," were turned out into the playground, whilst those who "were of use," found their hands pretty full. A deal of cleaning and scouring went on, that was uninteresting enough; but then there were all manner of decorations to be made, and over these the "useful ones," made themselves very happy. Though having but little idea what they were for, Lydia exceedingly enjoyed this part of the business. She was a neat-handed child, and her services were in great request.

All through the 7th, "old blue ribbons" were continually arriving; and though their attire presented no uniformity of make or design, yet they all, without exception, wore grey dresses, and bonnets trimmed with blue. Lydia observed, moreover, that when they had put off their outdoor garments, each wore a white apron, a cap ornamented with a blue bow, and round her neck a narrow blue ribbon, from which hung the St. Mary medal, the badge of the confraternity.

These elder members of the party were soon absorbed into the very centre of active operations, while the younger children had little more to do than to assist when required, and wait upon the elders. It was a very merry scene, and every one seemed full of happy enjoyment. All but one, that is, and she shrank away out of observation, and cared nothing for the preparations. Poor Charlotte! this was to her a time of sharp trial. She had worn her red ribbon long and well, and her name had been for months on the list for promotion to the St. Mary medal. This 8th of September was to have been her great day, the day which was to have numbered her among the monitors. And now all this was over, and not only so, but she had lost what she had so patiently and rightly gained, and that by another's sin. She dreaded when the time should come to dress for chapel the remarks which the "old blue ribbons" would make on the absence of her medal, and creeping away into the playground, she hid herself and her grief behind the great tree.

That evening another sting was added to her pain. Just before tea, Rose and Sanna were summoned to the Superior's room. They obeyed in considerable trepidation. There they found not

only the Mother and Sister Mabel, but also Mr. Neville. The Mother signed to them to stand before him.

"It is now more than a year, Rose Berger and Susanna Brest, since you forfeited your good-conduct medals by very wilful disobedience," said the Chaplain gravely but kindly. "Now Sister Mabel has reported, and the mark-books have testified, that during the sixteen months which have since elapsed you have both been striving very earnestly to redeem the past. The Mother Superior and I, have therefore resolved to restore to you your medals, which have been all this time in Sister Mabel's safe keeping, in the hope that you will wear them faithfully for the future, leaning on a strength not your own, and that you may never forfeit them again."

He took from Sister Mabel's hand as he spoke the long lost medals. The ribbons were faded, and the medals tarnished with lying by, but each girl knew her own, as the ribbons were marked with their initials.

"You must clean up these medals, my little maids," said the Superior smiling, as the children curtsied in silent joy alternately to her and the Chaplain, "and here is some fresh ribbon for you to hang them on. Let the brightness of the medals when they are cleaned, and the freshness of the ribbons remind you that true penitence for a fault, a penitence, that is, which shows itself by a hearty persevering striving to do better for the future, makes all things new, and gives us a fresh start."

The children's faces glowed with pleasure, but they did not speak.

"And let the remembrance of the fault which has deprived you of these so long," said Mr. Neville, "keep this lesson always before you; that, it is not enough to have done well once, to have once gained a point in our advance in the 'narrow way,' but that to keep that point, that place which we have gained, requires daily effort, daily watchfulness, and continual turning for help to a strength which is not our own. How may we gain that strength?" he asked of Sanna.

"By prayer, Sir," answered the little girl.

"Right, but suppose you are very busy, or not alone, must you kneel down to do this, or make a long prayer?"

"Oh, no, Sir."

"What then?"

Sanna glanced at Sister Mabel, and then at Rose; she was too shy to make more than short answers to the Chaplain's questions. "Rose, tell me then," he said, noticing the child's bashfulness.

"It is enough, Sir," replied Rose in a low voice, and with downcast eyes, "to say, when temptation comes, 'LORD, help me.'"

"And that is what you did not do when the temptation came to be disobedient and defiant."

"No, Sir."

"Try to remember to do so for the future. Now kneel down both of you, and I will give you God's blessing."

When they rose from their knees, the Superior and Sister Mabel kissed them kindly, and the happy children curtsayed themselves out of the room. They paused for a moment outside the door to hug each other, and then hurried off as fast as their feet would carry them in search of Sister Rachel. They found her very busy superintending the arrangement and decoration of the refectory. Quite reckless of a garland she held in her hands they flung themselves upon her, one on either side.

"Oh, my wreath!" she screamed. But they cared nothing for the wreath.

"Sister dear," they whispered, dragging her towards the door, "you must come outside, we want you particularly."

She came greatly wondering. But when she heard their tale and saw the tarnished medals, she became as regardless of the wreath as they: and after some affectionate kisses and congratulations, dropped it on the ground, and went off to find wash-leather for the cleaning of them, and red silk for the sewing up of the ribbons. With these the two girls started off into the playground to arrange their newly recovered treasures unobserved. But darting round the great tree they came upon Charlotte, seated alone and disconsolate upon the ground. Forgetting at the moment their companion's circumstances, they exclaimed, "Oh, Charlotte, see; Mr. Neville has given us back our medals!"

It needed but this to fill the little girl's cup of bitterness to overflowing. Unknown to herself, she had been unconsciously clinging to a hope, that before evening her innocence would be proved, or at least admitted, and she restored to favour. Now, in the sudden destruction of this hope, she perceived how strong a hold it had had upon her. With an inarticulate exclamation, half of anger, half of grief, she rose and darted towards the house. Meeting Sister Rachel at the refectory door, she threw herself into her arms. "Oh, Sister Rachel, oh, Sister Rachel," she sobbed, "my heart will break."

"Hush, dear, come with me." The Sister looked round for some place where they could be alone. The store room was empty. She drew Charlotte into it and locked the door. Sister Rachel had a most loving heart, but she had not Sister Mabel's power of

placing trials in their true light. She could only repeat over and over again, "My poor dear, I am so sorry, but it must come right some day, Charlotte, I'm sure it must."

Perhaps, however, it was as well that Sister Rachel's attempt at consolation went no further than this, for Charlotte's distress was just then too passionate for her to have listened to any reasoning, the long uninterrupted burst of crying did her real good, and she was soothed by the Sister's manifest sympathy.

"Now come with me into the refectory," said the latter coaxingly, when the storm of crying was nearly spent, "come and be my fag, it's as much as we shall do to finish before the tea-bell rings. Come, there's only me and Carrie, and Miriam, and Sophy Seabright, and you know we're all so sorry for you. Come, there's a dear."

This homely comforting had its effect. Charlotte tried to stop her sobs. She put her arms round Sister Rachel's neck and kissed her fondly, and then followed her silently into the refectory. There her tear-swollen face excited general commiseration. Sophy Seabright immediately called to her cheerily to come and help her, and Sister Rachel, after waiting a moment to see her actively employed, went to look for Sister Mabel.

"I have done all I can, indeed, my Sister," sighed the latter in answer to Sister Rachel's earnest pleadings. "I am as sorry for this poor little girl, and as convinced of her innocence, as you are. But the Father says there is no proof, nothing but my bare opinion, and the Mother says it would be very bad for the others if, after what has passed, Charlotte were reinstated until her innocence were fairly proved. I mean," continued Sister Mabel, "that, presuming Charlotte to be innocent, it would be bad for those who have done the wrong, for they would then salve their consciences with the notion that after all they had not injured her. I said all I dared, I assure you, but ever since I begged Isabella off the last time, the Father has had but small opinion of my judgment," and Sister Mabel sighed again.

"I don't think it was wise," said Sister Rachel bluntly. She had not the slightest intention of making a home thrust, but it was such, and Sister Mabel winced a little.

"It's no small trial, indeed," said Sister Rachel again, "for some of those idle children have been putting about the story, and I heard one of the 'old blue ribbons,' it was Mary Dawes I think, say, 'it has an ugly appearance;' and then you see Charlotte will have to give up her place of carrying St. Joseph's banner to Fanny Wright, and go down below all the ribbons." Sister Rachel spoke almost as discontentedly as if the wrong had been done to her.

"Well, it can't be helped," replied Sister Mabel. "As to the 'old blue ribbons,' take an opportunity of letting them know, if you can, that neither you nor I believe Charlotte guilty."

With this Sister Rachel was compelled for the present to be satisfied. Then the tea-bell rang, and after that meal the children all adjourned to the lavatory to dress themselves for chapel, for the festival was now to begin.

Sister Mabel was just leaving her room when a knock at her door was heard. She opened it, and there on the threshold were Rose and Sanna, both looking woe-begone and full of tears.

"What can be the matter now!" exclaimed Sister Mabel in dismay, for seeing that the children held their medals in their hands she concluded that they had already involved themselves in some fresh scrape, which made them unwilling to avail themselves of the restoration.

It was a relief to her, therefore, when Rose faltered out, "Sister, Sanna and I cannot bear to put these on while Charlotte hasn't hers. We think it will make her more unhappy, and we deserved to lose ours, and she hasn't deserved to lose hers, and the 'old blue ribbons' have been noticing she hasn't got hers, and she is crying so. Sister, may we leave our medals here till after the festival?"

"No, my dears," replied the Sister, inwardly rejoicing that Rose's exultation in the recovery of her medal was so wholesomely tempered, "under the circumstances it will be more humble for you to wear them. Wear them in obedience, with a feeling of humiliation, and a remembrance of the apostle's warning, 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'"

She took the ribbons as she spoke and passed them over the children's heads, kissed them, and then went on to the lavatory to see if the rest of her flock were ready. Rose and Sanna followed her. A general exclamation was heard as they entered, "Oh they have their medals back!" and the greater number of their companions pressed round with eager congratulations.

Sister Mabel looked about for Charlotte. She was dressed and standing in the passage crying quietly, but very bitterly. The Sister went up to her and taking her head in both her hands lifted up the flushed and feverish face.

"Do you find it so very cold, my little maid?" she asked with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Cold, Sister dear! I am so hot;" and indeed her hands were burning.

"The 'east wind,' I meant," said Sister Mabel.

Charlotte started. "Oh, I had quite forgotten! how foolish I

am. I forgot it was only that. Of course it is good for Rose and Sanna to have their medals back, but not for me, I did not think of that."

"Think of it now, and go and be fag to Sister Fanny and Sister Rachel, and help them marshal the little ones from St. Joseph's."

Charlotte kissed the Sister's hand and went off briskly on her errand.

Lydia had been one of the warmest congratulators of Rose and Sanna, and she now stood by them, amused and amazed at the preparations going on around her. The children all wore their Sunday frocks of grey, but instead of bonnets each girl had now a little cap fastened with a white bow. The monitors' caps were similar, only tied with blue. When all were ready a pair of white gloves was handed to each, and a nosegay; and then they all filed in orderly manner into the playground. Here they found the old children of Mary, dressed, as before described, in grey and blue, and wearing white gloves and carrying nosegays like the children. Here, too, were presently brought all the Banners of the establishment, than which Lydia thought she had never seen anything more beautiful. First there was the banner of the holy Cross, white and gold, in the centre of which appeared the sacred monogram, and on either side those of St. Mary and St. John. This belonged to the "Mother House," Rose informed Lydia, and was to be carried before the Sisters, who would presently join in their procession.

"The two hospitals have each a banner too," said Rose, "see those three Sisters have just brought them out."

The St. Barnabas banner was red and white embroidered with a cross, and the saint's monogram, round which was the text, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of CHRIST." The St. Luke's banner was similar in design, but the colour was green, and the surrounding motto, "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

Soon after there was borne into the playground the banner of St. John, crimson and gold, embroidered with the emblems of the Blessed Sacrament, and round it the words, "Love is of GOD, he that loveth not knoweth not GOD, for GOD is love."

And now Carrie, assisted by the monitors, brought out the orphanage banners. First that of St. Joseph, a rich chocolate brown, fringed with gold, and beautifully embroidered with a lily on a golden ground, the saint's monogram, and the motto of the red ribbon medal, namely, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD." This banner was given into charge of Fanny Wright, now senior red ribbon.

Next came the confraternity banner, belonging, as Rose ex-

plained to Lydia, to such members of the confraternity of the children of Mary, as had never belonged to the orphanage. There was now a large muster of these present, and they were distinguished from the orphanage children of Mary, by the fact, that, instead of medals, they wore white crosses. Their banner was similar in shape and design to that of St. Joseph, only the ground colour was blue, and the motto "As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters."

But Lydia looked with the greatest interest on the last banner of all, "Our Lady's banner," white and gold like that of the mother house, but embroidered with the exact impress of the St. Mary medal, namely with the figure of Blessed Mary herself and the motto, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word." From either side of the banner depended three blue scarfs or ribbons, held by six little girls, who, together with Carrie, the banner-bearer, wore white scarfs over their shoulders.

By this time a great number of persons thronged the playground; almost all the inmates of St. Mary's had assembled there; and the chapel bell beginning to ring, the procession was formed.

First went the banner of St. John, borne and surrounded by young ladies, associates of the house, dressed in white with red sashes, and caps tied with red ribbons. These were followed by the girls of the industrial school; behind whom came the hospital banners also borne by associates; and after them the probationers and novices two and two; then the banner of the mother house, behind which walked the Superior and the professed Sisters. Following these were the elder children of St. Joseph's, surrounding their banner, carried as before stated, by the senior red ribbon, Fanny Wright; then the confraternity girls with their pretty blue banner, borne by the senior among themselves; and finally the children of St. Mary's orphanage two and two, and their banner with its six supporters, preceded by all the old children of Mary, and followed by the orphanage Sisters, who brought up the rear.

Two of the "old children," (as the orphans called them) were young married women and had each brought their babies. These little creatures were taken down to St. Joseph's cottage where Anne Dorrington, (an old blue ribbon,) and a lady associate, took care of such young things as were too small to take part in the proceedings.

As the procession started the following hymn was raised.

"JESU, the virgin's Crown, do Thou
Accept us as in prayer we bow,
Born of that Virgin whom alone
The Mother and the Maid we own.

Amongst the lilies Thou dost feed,
And thither choirs of virgins lead;
Adorning all Thy chosen brides
With glorious gifts Thy love provides.

And whither, LORD, Thy footsteps wend,
Pure virgin hearts with praise attend;
For Thee they pour their sweetest song,
And after Thee rejoicing throng.

O gracious LORD, we Thee implore
Thy grace on every sense to pour;
From all pollution keep us free,
And make us pure in heart for Thee.

All praise to GOD the FATHER be,
All praise, Eternal SON, to Thee,
Whom with the SPIRIT we adore
For ever and for evermore. Amen."

The chapel, which was a spacious one, was well filled. Not only was every inmate of the house of St. Mary and St. John that could possibly come assembled there, but also a large number of subscribers, and well-wishers, to its various works of mercy. These took up the hymn as the procession moved up the chapel to the strains of the organ, played by the most accomplished musician among the Sisters, Sister Jane, at that time head of the hospital for incurables.

The Sisters passed on to their stalls in the choir; the rest that followed falling into their proper places; the banner-bearers, however, one and all first passing on into the chancel and arranging their banners in order there.

The hymn being ended this antiphon was sung: "A garden enclosed is My Sister, My Spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Alleluia."

Then the service was chanted, and before the hymn for the day, was intoned, "With all these I sought rest; and in whose inheritance shall I abide? So the Creator of all things gave Me a commandment, and He that made Me caused My tabernacle to rest." The full choir responded, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." One voice answered, *V.* "He feedeth among the lilies." The full choir responded, "And I am His." Then one voice chanted, "Glory be to the FATHER, and to the SON, and to the HOLY GHOST." And the full choir and whole congregation burst forth with the response, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." The strain swelling out in triumphant exultation, then seeming to die away like the soft echoes of an angel's song.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LESSON FOR THE DAY.

THE service over, the Chaplain mounted the pulpit. It was his custom to deliver his address at this, the eve service, that the special lesson he wished his hearers to carry away with them might form the subject of their "intentions" at the Holy Communion on the morrow. He endeavoured on these occasions to say a word suitable to all his hearers, even to the very youngest child amongst them; but he directed his exhortations mainly to such of his flock as were scattered in the world, and had returned for this one holiday to renew the old and happy associations of their childhood and youth.

He knew pretty well their special difficulties, dangers, and temptations, and many a young woman had carried away with her after such services as the present a "word in season," which had been her strength in weakness, her guiding star in obscurity.

The "confraternity girls," both from the orphanage and the "home," mustered in unusual force this day, and in the brief pause which followed the "invocation," while the crowded congregation settled themselves in their places, the Chaplain surveyed them with deep and almost painful interest.

When every one was at length seated in quiet attention, he began:

"We took for our text last year, 'As the lily among thorns, so is My love amongst the daughters,' our special lesson being the possibility, with the help of the Holy Spirit, of imitating the example of Blessed Mary in every situation of our daily life, and so becoming, like her, lilies, fragrant with the odour of lovely example—spotless in purity and truth; and that, my daughters, not in the Paradise of God, not in the garden of the Saints, where nothing to defile or mar can enter; but in the wilderness of this world; 'among the thorns' of ungodliness, unlovingness, meanness, falsehood, heresy, and all other evils of which this world is full.

"I purpose to take as our text to-day the holy, humble, loving words with which the Blessed Mary threw her heart open to every impulse of the Holy Spirit; with which she accepted His will as the only will that she would ever know, and offered herself a living sacrifice to the glory of His Great Name. 'Behold the handmaid of the LORD; be it unto me according to thy word.'" After dwelling awhile on the great fact that the secret of true blessedness is the perfect union of the human will with the Divine, and that

Mary, the second Eve, broke through the curse the first Eve's wilfulness and rebellion had brought upon the world by this entire surrender of herself to the one only will of God;—Mr. Neville proceeded to point out to his hearers that Mary's surrender of herself was made in utter ignorance, and as might be said, *indifference* to what that surrender of herself might bring her. "Just as a little child," said he, "overjoyed at finding itself in its father's arms, asks no questions, feels no care to know whither it is going, but rejoices and is merry while the sun shines, and cowers lovingly on its father's bosom in the storm; but feels no fear, no misgiving, its confidence in the love and wisdom that is guiding it is so unbounded; so firm its faith, that its father must be carrying it by the wisest ways to the place where it is best that it should be.

"Now you, my children," continued he, "who have not yet begun the struggle of life among the thorns of the great noisy world without, must try to feel like Blessed Mary this holy indifference as to what your lot in that great world may be. You must not mistake me, and suppose by this that I mean that you are 'not to care' what position you take, what work you do, or how you do it. Your baptismal vow binds you 'to do your duty,' that means 'your very best,' in whatever position of life God calls you to. But I mean this," here he paused and looked towards the 'confraternity girls,' "that supposing you have honestly done your best you must not be cast down because things seem to go 'cross' with you. It may be—it is very likely—that you will have to grow among thorns. In that case, if, like Blessed Mary, you have given up your will to God, you will be quite satisfied that it is best for you to be there. Your only care will be to grow so straight and strong, that your blossoms may rise above the wounding thorn, so that you may preserve them pure and uninjured; that when the Heavenly Gardener passes by, He may know where you are by the fragrance of your holy and consistent life; that you may be fit, when His time comes, to be transplanted into His Garden. This will be your only care. You will not try to transplant yourselves, or even wish to do it. The lily that is uprooted by any other hand than that of the Gardener, must wither and perish; and the surrendered heart, like Mary's, will love so deeply, trust so implicitly, that it will never say 'this is not well,' but, 'I will trust and not be afraid,' even when the thorns grow thickest round it."

It has often been remarked that it is a great shame when 'a story' merges into a sermon; and I suppose my young readers will think Mr. Neville's sermon no exception to this rule; but I have quoted thus much, because these words returned in after

years to one at least among his then hearers as a message from Heaven.

One 'Child of Mary' was then listening to them with a tear of compassion in her bright blue eyes for lilies so unhappily planted; but with an inward thanksgiving that at all events such a fate would never be hers. A lily she prayed she might be, but a lily among lilies, and in the Gardener's perpetual Presence, and Carrie Saunders could not restrain a pitying glance at those 'Children of Mary' now roughing it in the world. She noticed that tears were silently rolling down the cheeks of more than one among them, and again she made a mental thanksgiving that nothing could ever cast her into the wilderness.

As Mr. Neville continued his address, the following words were, however, though she knew it not, specially applicable to her.

"Could Mary have known as she uttered these words of dedication to what a life of suffering she pledged herself, she would, perchance, have shrunk back in dismay. But it is in tenderest love our Heavenly FATHER hides His purpose from us. The goal to which He leads us is the Mansion He has Himself prepared for us; but if we would reach it, we must travel by His paths, not our own. The comparatively pleasant paths by which He guides some, would be bad for others; and he who would quit the appointed path, cannot complain if he misses the goal.

"He was leading Blessed Mary to the place on 'His Right Hand,' but before she could attain such a height of glory, she must be 'perfected by suffering.' She had given her will to Him; if, then, she would share in His glory, she must first partake of His sufferings. She had accepted the mysterious vocation of the Second Eve; she must therefore with the Second Adam share and bear the curse pronounced on Adam in all its intensity.

"But all this was in mercy veiled from her. Possibly she thought when she pronounced the words 'be it unto me according to thy word,' of nothing but the awful blessedness which the Angel had announced to her. Oh, if she could have foreseen her life-long share in the Crucifixion!"

Carrie Saunders listened, and thought how sad that any one should be obliged to suffer; and how delightful to think that there were some 'comparatively easy paths,' as Mr. Neville had called them, by which some souls at least might reach the Heavenly Mansion; and that one such path was hers. She felt intensely happy; Mr. Neville's sermon did not seem particularly applicable to her, she thought; and the special lesson Carrie drew from that day's discourse, the special intention with which she approached the *Blessed Sacrament* next morning was, that she might prove her

thanksgiving for her happy lot by perfect correspondence with the Grace bestowed upon her; that her lily blossoms might be so pure and fragrant, that she might not be unworthy of the Flower Garden in which she had been planted. "Never be so unworthy as to be uprooted," thought she shudderingly. But Carrie had yet to learn that the uprooting might be for the plant's greater perfection. She did learn it afterwards; and when the remembrance of that fair day returned to her in after years, the recollection of that lovely chapel bright with gorgeous flowers, its splendid altar, gay banners, and happy worshippers, and above all of the holy old man and his loving words of warning against fainting in adversity, though at first it wrung her heart with an agony which sometimes seemed too keen for life or reason to bear, yet afterwards it brought the lesson of perfect love and perfect trust—the 'holy indifference' Mr. Neville was even now pressing on his hearers—home to her heart; and the true Child of Mary was able to echo her true Mother's words and say, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word."

But while Carrie was basking in present peace, undisturbed by any fears of what the morrow might bring forth, another young heart in chapel, "that knew its own bitterness," was thinking that most certainly it had somehow or other "got amongst the thorns." Little Charlotte Armstrong hung on the preacher's words with eager interest; and presently fancied that he must have intended these which followed expressly for her.

"The first trial which fell on Blessed Mary, was a share in the degradation of the Second Adam thus described by the Psalmist: 'I am a worm and no man; a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people.' She who was to be exalted to the Right Hand of the Son of Man, must first be humbled with Him to the very dust. The finger of scorn was pointed at her. The most terrible accusation that can be framed against a pure and holy soul was brought against her. Her very glory was turned to be her shame. And there were two elements in this trial which must have added greatly to the intensity of the suffering.

"First, she was suspected of that which was most abhorrent to her whole nature. When persons are accused of something they have not done, but which yet, through the nature of their besetting sin, they might (but for the restraining grace of God) have done, the soul finds comfort in its very humiliation, saying, 'I perceive in this accusation the just punishment of sins I have often committed, and though not guilty in this particular instance, yet I will meekly bear this public shame as the just recompense of secret sins;' but when a soul is accused of some sin at which its whole being

revolts, it writhes under it with a bitterness not to be described. Thus a noble, upright nature, accused of dishonesty and fraud; a simple-hearted soul, of base and double dealing; a true heart that would rather die than utter falsehood, accused and branded as a liar; and worse—the pure soul charged with sin, the very thought of which makes it shrink with sickening horror; unless, like Blessed Mary, entirely surrendered to the will of Him Who made Himself of no reputation, these toss and writhe in their anguish, or sink down numbed with despair; they feel as if the evil of which they are accused had somehow stained them, they cannot away with it; it abides with them a loathsome presence. And such a trial as this was Blessed Mary's.

"Secondly, to be thus suspected and accused by unrighteous persons is a sore trial indeed, but when holy persons suspect and stand aloof, the trial is tenfold. And it was not the idle gossips of Nazareth whose suspicions agonized the heart of Blessed Mary, but those of Joseph, himself a Saint. Joseph, a sharer with her in her high hopes for the redemption of Israel; who with her waited for the coming Messiah; who with her watched for the tokens that should announce the Advent of the Deliverer; *he* suspected, he disbelieved, he shunned her, nay, he made preparations to set her aside for ever as evil!

"Think for one moment of the utter loneliness of that young heart suddenly scathed by the undeserved anger of the righteous; not set aside by the irreligious out of their path, but ignored as evil by a Saint of GOD! And this trial also was Blessed Mary's."

Nothing was further from Mr. Neville's mind at this moment than anything connected with the orphanage; his eyes and thoughts were on the Confraternity, some of whom had already found the battle of life a weary, heart-breaking toil; but the random shaft found aim with "Little Armstrong;" she slid her hand under her cape into Sister Rachel's, next whom she sat, and could no longer see the preacher for a mist of tears. The Sister's warm pressure, as the little hot hand sought hers, showed Charlotte that she was also applying the Father's words to the young girl's grief, and after service was over, she laid her cheek against the Sister's, and said, "Sister, if I bear this well, shall I be 'a Child of Mary?'"

"Oh, yes, dear," replied Sister Rachel heartily, "blue ribbon or no blue ribbon, nothing can prevent your being that. Remember what the Father said about patience and silence."

What the Father had said on these subjects was this:—"How did the LORD's Lily meet this terrible closing in of wounding thorns, this bewildering shock to her faith in the angel's message? She *had given her will to the LORD*, and so in His Strength she bore

it, as He Himself bore the blasphemies directed against Himself: 'When He was accused of the Chief Priests and Elders He answered nothing.' The language of His Heart was, 'Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O God; I am content to do it; yea, Thy Law is within My Heart;' and that Divine Will was, that He, the Incarnate God—the sinless Adam—should drink the cup of bitterness and degradation to its very dregs. He stood in the strength of His own inherent Godhead; Mary, in the Power of the Highest Which overshadowed her. Her words were, 'Behold the Handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word;' and that word was, that she, the second Eve, should bear, without sin, the extremity of the curse for woman's sin. And she bore it like Him, in Whom was her strength, in *silence*. No angry upbraidings, no frantic protestations of innocence, no bursts of passionate despair. All such were precluded by her voluntary self-dedication. He had dashed her suddenly from bewildering glory, to a still more bewildering shame. But it was His Will, and she had elected to do that Will. She was content to do it, His Law was within her heart. She answered nothing.

"The wise man speaking of 'false accusation,' says that it is 'worse than death.' But we may triumph over death in the strength of Him Who has tasted death; and equally so over the living death of slander through Him 'Who was numbered with the transgressors.' In His strength, my daughters, we may *live down* slander. It is, perhaps, the most wearisome and trying task that any one can have to perform. It is also one of the most beneficial; for it requires the most entire surrender of the will to GOD, unceasing prayer, unfailing watchfulness; the living entirely out of ourselves and in GOD; an absolute distrust of self, implicit trust in GOD. It is a daily grinding, a daily crucifixion; but it is the crucifixion of the whole body of sin, the utter annihilation of the old Adam: it is the painful, nay, sometimes agonizing grinding down of every thing which opposes itself in us to the Will of GOD; the grinding and polishing which will make us 'elect stones' and 'precious,' meet to be 'built up a spiritual house,' 'a holy temple,' filled with the ever-abiding Presence of GOD, and 'Whose Corner Stone is CHRIST.'"

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOLIDAY.

THE children dispersed very quietly after the service. The younger ones went to bed; while the 'old Children of Mary,' retired to the orphanage chapel, where they spent some time in quiet preparation for the next day's Communion. With them were the monitors, and any among the elder children who wished to have some time to themselves for special prayer and self-examination. Amongst the latter were Charlotte, Rose, and Sanna. These three stood together waiting for Sister Mabel at the dormitory door to ask leave to go to the oratory instead of straight to bed.

"Sister, what 'special intention' shall I make at my spiritual communion to-morrow?" asked Charlotte, when leave had been given.

"Ask for grace to be able to lay aside all harassing thoughts about your 'special' trouble: to accept it quietly and cheerfully without wishing it away: to have sufficient self-command 'not to watch the weathercock,'" Sister Mabel added, smiling. Charlotte smiled too, and wishing the Sister a respectful and affectionate good night, walked off to the chapel.

"And we, Sister, what should our 'special intention' be?" asked Rose, who had hold of Sanna's hand.

"Your special prayer, Rose, should, I think, be one for—"

"Recollection, Sister?" said Rose, anticipating the word that was coming.

"Yes: to overcome your heedlessness and impetuosity: to remember, even when most merry, Whose you are, and Whom you are pledged to serve."

"And me, Sister," whispered Sanna, shyly.

"Do you pray, my little girl, that you may lean so constantly on that strength for which no one ever yet asked in vain, that instead of saying, as you so often do now, 'So-and-so might be able to do that, but not I,' you may always feel and be able to say, 'Whatever I ought to do, I can most surely do, for the LORD Himself is my Helper.'"

She kissed the two children, and with a few kindly words of counsel about their newly-recovered medals, dismissed them also to the oratory.

"Sister," said a low pleading voice behind her at this moment, "*may I go to the chapel before I go to bed?*"

Sister Mabel turned and surveyed the speaker. She had granted permission to the three children who had just left her without a moment's hesitation. Now she paused long before she answered, "Of course, Isabella, you can do so if you wish."

"What would you advise me to make my special intention to-morrow morning, Sister?" asked Isabella in a softer and more pleading voice than before.

"The obtaining of truth and sincerity," replied the Sister sharply and sternly, "and that you may be delivered from hypocrisy." She turned back into the dormitory without another word. Isabella was startled. "Can she suspect?" thought she. "But it is impossible. I have been so careful, and Jemmy and Hetty dare not tell." She paused a few moments considering, and then she too went into the chapel, where her very demonstrative devotion so greatly annoyed Sophy Seabright, next whom she knelt, that the latter gave her at last a nudge with her elbow, and whispered, (reversing the old proverb) "Deep waters are *still*, Isabella."

At half-past seven next morning the St. John's chapel-bell rang every inmate of St. Mary's that could attend in to the Celebration of the Holy Communion. There were a good number of communicants; for beside the entire Community, Probationers, Associates, &c., there were all the Confraternity girls, and the "old blue ribbons," whose great day it was, as well as all who were communicants among the girls and children.

At the end of the Nicene Creed, Mr. Neville advanced to the chancel step to enforce by a few more earnest words the lesson he had given on the eve.

He recommended to one and all as their "special intention" that day, the obtaining of that childlike, undoubting love and perfect trust, which would result in a "holy indifference" as to how or where they should be called upon to "do the LORD's Will."

"Let all true daughters of the Second Eve," said he, "approach with their Mother's words, 'Behold the Handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to Thy Word,' and leave their future without choice or care entirely at His disposal. To such their vocation will be plainly shown; they will hear a voice behind them, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it.' Remember 'vocation,' means 'the Call of GOD.' Leave it to GOD to call and direct, be it your only care to follow instantly, cheerfully, lovingly, serve faithfully, obey implicitly.

"The destined end of every vocation is the Right Hand of GOD. It may be—

'That weary deserts we may tread,
A dreary labyrinth may thread,

Through dark ways underground be led ;
 Yet if we will our Guide obey,
 The dreariest path, the darkest way
 Shall issue out in Heavenly Day ;
 And we, on divers shores now cast,
 Shall meet, our perilous voyage past,
 Safe in our FATHER'S House at last.'

"Courage, then, my children. Never mind how dark, how lonely the way. Embrace now, bow now before the holy, loving Will of GOD, (Who wills, remember, your salvation :) be this your only aim that at the end of your day's work it may be said of you, 'she hath done what she could.'"

The Chaplain spoke with such earnest animation, and the tones of his voice rang so cheerily through the chapel, that there was not one present, however listless and indifferent, who did not *listen*; and there was not one to whom a remembrance of this address did not come back in after years. Not all heeded. Not all obeyed. But into the hearts of many the seed dropped silently, lay dormant for weeks and months and even years, and then germed forth a living principle long after he, who had sown the seed, had gone to his own account.

By the time the Blessing after the Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice had been pronounced, it was near the hour when the Sisters, according to their rule, said the Office for Terce.

This is the service for the "third hour," (or nine o'clock) said in commemoration of the condemnation and scourging of our Blessed LORD and, more especially still, of the descent of the HOLY GHOST on the Faithful on the Day of Pentecost. The hymn for this service is a direct invocation of the HOLY SPIRIT, and the prayers following are for the special illumination and direction of the whole Church collectively, and of each individual worshipper particularly. In all religious houses the service is said before the active business of the day begins.

On this occasion the whole congregation remained to unite in it with the Sisters. It opened with the customary Invocation, Versicles, and Hymn; after which the special antiphon for the day was chanted.¹

Antiphon. "As the vine, brought I forth pleasant savour, and I am the Mother of Fair Love. Alleluia."

After the portion of the 119th Psalm appointed for Terce this Antiphon was repeated by full choir, all the congregation joining. Then was said the "Chapter," Gen. iii. 14, 15. "And the LORD God said unto the Serpent, I will put enmity between thee and the

¹ See "Day Hours of the English Church," p. 184.

Woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel."

The choir chanted the Response: "As in Adam all die, even so in CHRIST shall all be made alive." Then followed the Versicle, sung by one voice: "For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." The choir continued the former Chant: "In CHRIST shall all be made alive." The single voice then sang the first part of the Gloria Patri; and from every worshipper in the chapel came again the full Response: "As in Adam all die, even so in CHRIST shall all be made alive."

Lydia listened with delight. She had never heard such singing before; and the music, the words, the whole scene, brought so vividly to her mind the description she had learnt from the Book of Revelation of the worship in Heaven, that from that day the thought of Heaven became to her an abiding reality; "worship," henceforth to her, a foretaste of the perpetual service of Heaven; the Communion of Saints a living fact, and not a mere speculation.

After breakfast the children swarmed out into the playground and garden, where, with the "old blue ribbons," and the whole of the small population from St. Joseph's, they passed the time in great enjoyment till twelve o'clock, which was the hour fixed for the distribution of prizes.

Then the Sisters Fanny and Rachel swept their babies back to St. Joseph's, and the children of St. Mary's, collected in their schoolroom, awaited in some anxiety the result of the examination of their mark-books. Lydia, however, had no anxiety, she knew she had not been long enough in school to be eligible for a prize, so there was nothing to disturb her amusement at the unwonted scenes that were going on around her. It was to her like an acted story-book, and so highly was she entertained and absorbed, that not even Rose could extract an answer from her to any question except after repeated applications of the point of her elbow.

The schoolroom, very prettily decorated with flowers and evergreens for the occasion, was somewhat crowded, a number of visitors being present. Chairs for the Chaplain, Superior, Orphanage Sisters and Mrs. and Miss Neville, were placed at one end of the room; before these were ranged the children. Behind them were the "old children," &c., and then the visitors.

It was not till proceedings had really begun, and the children had sung their opening song, that Lydia felt any special interest in the distribution of prizes. Sister Mabel uncovered a table in front of the Chaplain, and there they were, displayed to view in tempting variety, and amongst them three medals, attached to red ribbons, but, alas! no blue ones.

Sister Mabel then read her report, and every girl, whose marks were creditable, was mentioned by name. Amongst these, "Lydia Lee" was commended "for marked progress both in lessons and needlework during the short time—only three months—which she had been there."

Several kind faces among her companions bent forward to smile their congratulations to the little girl on this announcement; but she, listening with no idea that she could in any way be mixed up with this, to her, curious scene, was quite unmoved by "Lydia Lee's" success, and heard her name without any perception of its being familiar to her.

The "little ones" received their prizes first. Amongst these, little Minnie walked off with two, amidst much applause from the by-standers. Then came their elders. Rose had been very successful. She obtained one prize for progress in lessons, especially in reading—really good reading, that is, with proper punctuation and expression—one for needlework, and the first prize, always given by Mr. Neville himself, for Scripture committed to memory during the past year.

He rose from his chair when Rose approached to receive this prize from him, and holding the book (a beautiful Prayer Book and Reference Bible bound in one, in his hand) spoke a few earnest words to all present on the inestimable advantage of having the LORD'S Word well in mind—His Law written on the heart. "Days might come," said he, "when sickness, or blindness, or some unforeseen combination of circumstances might prevent us from studying or hearing the written Word. But that which is in the memory no man can take from us, and by storing up in our minds this Precious Word, our memories will become treasure-houses indeed, out of which we shall be able to bring forth 'stores new and old' to meet every possible emergency; and with which we shall be able to garrison our hearts against those worst enemies of our souls—sinful and idle thoughts. God bless you, my little girl," he added, as he placed the prize in the hands of the happy, blushing child, "you have garnered up much precious seed. Do not let it lie idle, rotting to waste, but 'hide it' in the ground of an 'honest and good heart'; pray daily for the dew of the HOLY SPIRIT upon it, that so it may bear fruit an hundred-fold to the glory of God's Great Name."

"Oh, Rose, how beautiful!" whispered Lydia, as she gazed in admiration at the prize Rose laid on her lap. She looked at it with the greatest interest. Here was a prize she thought she might one day gain, and she determined to try for it against that time of the year. Sanna, too, had a prize, a little pocket Prayer Book,

for having committed the whole Psalter to memory; and Lydia's ambition and emulation were now fairly roused.

There were prizes also both for housework and needlework given by two Lady Associates. The housework prizes were given first. Rose took the first, Charlotte the second, and Harriet Bond, a girl then sitting on Lydia's right, the third.

Rose received her prize amid renewed acclamations from her companions in which all the room joined. She was a general favourite, and there was scarcely a girl who did not rejoice in her success. But Sister Mabel almost regretted she had not passed Charlotte over in the allotment of prizes. When her name was called she came forward amid a dead silence. Her cheeks were flushed crimson, her eyes downcast, her hands trembling. So marked was the silence which prevailed while she received her prize, that the lady who gave it noticed it; and judging there was something amiss with the girl she was rewarding, spoke a few kindly words of warning on the worse than uselessness of prizes gained for progress in anything unaccompanied by progress in good conduct. She spoke very wisely and kindly, and intended her words to be of general application; but Charlotte received them as fresh abasement in the sight of her companions. She could scarcely maintain her composure, and as she reluctantly took the unwelcome prize and curtsied to the donor, she cast an involuntary, imploring glance towards the Superior, and Mr. Neville.

They were not noticing, or even thinking of her. The Superior was, with the help of her list, looking out the next prize; and Mr. Neville was exchanging salutations with some one he had recognized among the guests.

Indifference is sometimes harder to bear than anger. Anger implies some personal interest. Charlotte felt this keenly. They were interested in the success of her companions, they had a kind word for each as she went up; but neither the Chaplain nor Superior had any interest in what she, "little Armstrong," might do. She had dropped out of their favour. Henceforth there would be no more words of kindly approval for her. No applause greeted her as she crept back to her place with her prize, and the name of the next candidate was called immediately.

Charlotte cowered down on her seat, and covered her face. She was in the back row of benches immediately in front of the "old children." Presently a face was pressed close to hers, and a voice whispered in her ear, "'Behold the Handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word.'"

A word spoken in season, how good it is. Charlotte looked back and met Sophy Seabright's pleasant smile. In a moment, Mr.

Neville's sermon, her own resolutions, her own "special intention," returned to her recollection. She could not check her tears, but they fell very gently. All bitterness, all feelings of irritation, passed away, and she was even able to look on with real interest at that which shortly followed.

When all the prizes were distributed, a very pretty little work-case remained on the table, and the Superior, taking it in her hand said smilingly, "It is not usual here to give prizes to any girl who has been less than a year in the school; but if any girl should have happened to have been remarkably backward on first entering, and to have exerted herself so heartily as to have made very great progress in a very short space of time, it is thought but fair to notice such a case. Miss Mary Neville has therefore determined to give a prize to one among you, who, in the very short space of three months, has worked her way from the very bottom of the school to the third class in lessons, and up to the second class in needle-work."

A burst of applause followed this speech; and Lydia thought, "What a pretty work-case, and what a lucky girl! I wonder who she is."

The Superior handed the work-case to Miss Mary, who came forward blushing and smiling, and stood by her father's side with her hand on his shoulder. She whispered to him, and he laughed and said, "My daughter is too shy to speak in public, so she wishes me to say for her that it is with very great pleasure that she gives this work-case, which is of her own making, to Lydia Lee." Louder applause than before, in which Charlotte heartily joined. But Lydia made no attempt to move. Half-a-dozen hands pushed her forward.

"What are you about!" she exclaimed, scandalized, but under her breath. "Rose, Harriet, how rude!"

"You goose," laughed Rose, "don't you see Miss Mary has a prize for you?"

"For me, impossible!" ejaculated Lydia, with a stare of such astonishment, that everybody laughed heartily; and Miss Mary, forgetting her shyness in amusement, said, "Come here, please, Lydia Lee, this is really for you, and I wish I could mend papa's stockings as neatly as you have done your brother's."

Lydia received her prize in utter bewilderment, curtsying vaguely first to Miss Mary, and then to every one all round.

"That will do, my dear, go back to your place," said Sister Mabel, laughing. And Lydia sat down again between Rose and Harriet, holding the work-case fast that she might be sure it was *not a dream*.

The ribbons and medals were not awarded till all the prizes had been disposed of. They were never given at random, or as a matter of course; and so it happened that to-day there were but three red ribbons to be given away, and no blue ones.

Harriet Bond, Lydia's right-hand neighbour, had the first red ribbon; two other girls, Fanny Short and Annie Carpenter, received the others. They were given by Mr. Neville himself, and then, with a great deal of clapping, and a buzz of merry voices, the assemblage broke up; and the whole orphanage, together with the "old children," proceeded to prepare for dinner.

Lydia now examined her work-case that she might assure herself that she had not dreamt this marvellous occurrence. It was a very marvel of a work-case, most beautifully made of red leather, and fitted up with thimble, needles, thread, and every implement required for a seamstress, including, oh, prize indeed, a lovely little pair of scissors! Lydia turned it over and over in her hand, and could scarcely realize her good fortune.

Charlotte just then came up. "I am so glad, dear Lydia," she said. And Lydia hugged her closely but without a word. They were both very near tears when Sister Mabel approached. She had been watching Charlotte, and sympathising with her; and now, putting her hands on her shoulders, and smiling kindly, she said, "Charlotte, my dear, there's lots of work for you. Sister Fanny wants you to help her and her babies to their dinner at St. Joseph's; Anne Dorrington is wanted up here; and there are two small baby visitors to be entertained and made much of. So start off, will you, you and Sister Rachel." She kissed the girl affectionately as she spoke.

Charlotte quite appreciated the kindness of this arrangement; and lifting one "baby visitor" in her arms, she followed Sister Rachel, who carried the other, down to St. Joseph's, and was soon absorbed in its infantine festivities.

The dinner, in the beautifully decorated refectory, Lydia thought very grand indeed. The "old blue ribbons," as Rose had previously apprised her, all dined at an upper table with Sister Mabel; and the "new blue ribbons" waited upon them. And after the dinner came a dessert, a real dessert! consisting, not only of fruit and cakes, but also of wines, home-made wines, in the manufacture of which some of the girls boasted that they had assisted.

With the wines came an annual ceremony. There entered the Superior, accompanied, not only by some of the senior Sisters, but also by the Chaplain, and Mrs. and Miss Neville. Places were provided for them, and Grace was sung, after which, Mr. Neville proposed the health of all absent "blue ribbons," and it was left, according

The anticipated walk to Penfold had been in the girls' minds all the week past, and they had discussed among themselves over and over again all the schemes of amusement they meant to pursue when there. It was a great damp to their anticipations, however, when they were told by Sister Ruth the afternoon before, just after work, that Sister Mabel had been sent for to the mother house, and had there received orders to go somewhere that evening. Where, Sister Ruth did not know, but she was to sleep out that night, and would certainly not be back the next day in time for any walk to Penfold.

A general groan followed this announcement. "Well," said Rose recovering, "we must make the most of you and Sister Rachel. Of course Sister Rachel will go with us," she added anxiously.

"My dears," replied Sister Ruth hesitatingly, "Sister Mabel sent for me before she started to give me all her directions for to-morrow, and she never said one word about a walk to Penfold."

With a sound something between a groan, a shriek, and a howl, each child began vociferating that this must simply have been because Sister Mabel had forgotten that the morrow was Michaelmas day, and appealing to Sister Ruth whether they had not always, time out of mind, walked to Penfold on that festival. Sister Ruth stopped her ears against the babel.

"Dear Sister, do listen," urged Rose pulling down her hands, "we do always go to Penfold on St. Michael's day, don't we?"

Sister Ruth could not deny there was such a custom.

"Sister Mabel was in such a hurry she forgot, I'm sure," pleaded Carrie gently.

The monitors were quite as eager as the rest about the morrow's holiday.

"Remember what a complete holiday you have had so lately," suggested Sister Ruth.

"Oh, that has nothing to do with it," exclaimed several; "we always have a holiday on the afternoon of Michaelmas day."

"It is almost the only saint's day throughout the year on which we do, remember that, dear Sister," urged Miriam eagerly, but quite respectfully.

"But I put it to you, my dears," replied Sister Ruth, "I cannot alter Sister Mabel's arrangements, can I? If she ordered certain things to be done to-morrow which make a walk to Penfold impossible, it would be a great breach of duty and obedience on my part to take you there, would it not?"

"Yes, yes," responded the children heartily; and then they gazed on each other in blank dismay.

Sister Ruth felt for their disappointment, the more so as with a

very few exceptions they were quite free from all ill-humour, or any disrespect towards herself. She took no notice of such ill-conditioned girls as flouted, and muttered "it's a shame!" but to the rest she said, "I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll ask Sister Rachel's advice."

This proposition was accepted with acclamations; and on Sister Rachel's appearance that evening, she was immediately surrounded and her counsel eagerly claimed. The Sister's round, good-humoured face grew quite long with dismay; dismay, not at the prospect of the St. Michael's Day holiday being lost, but at the audacity of any one supposing it possible that Sister Mabel's plans could be altered in her absence. Seeing the children's eagerness, however, she wisely forbore to dash all their hopes, and only suggested that they had better all sleep upon the difficulty that night, and that then, possibly, some conclusion might be arrived at in the morning. With this the malcontents were obliged to be, for the present, contented; but went to bed rather dismally.

Sister Christine came down in the morning to take Sister Mabel's place with the scripture class, &c.: but not a whisper of the doubtful half-holiday did she hear. Every one in the orphanage tacitly felt that Sister Christine was not likely to view the loss of a holiday as a misfortune. One hope remained. Sister Rachel had left word with the monitors, when she went down to St. Joseph's that morning, that she would make personal application to the Mother Superior to know whether the accustomed walk to Penfold might take place or not.

Anxiously did the children look for her return. She had promised that they should, if possible, have their answer by the time they had finished their dinner. Patiently they waited, but Sister Rachel did not come. To add to their discontent it was a glorious autumn day, with a fresh south-west wind, but no signs of rain. Such a day for a walk!

"I must ring the work-bell," said Sister Ruth, "it is just two o'clock, we must not really wait any longer."

"Here she is," screamed a chorus of children, and Sister Rachel stood in the midst of a suddenly silent crowd.

But, oh dear! how dismal was the message she brought! She had seen the Superior herself, who had said that she never interfered with any arrangement made by the Sisters Superior in their absence: that if Sister Mabel had said the children were to work that afternoon, work they must, however well-established the precedent of the Michaelmas walk to Penfold; and that every direction left by Sister Mabel for them during her absence must be carefully observed till her return.

This message was received in profound silence, followed by some pettish exclamations, and not a few tears. Even the monitors looked very blank, and Mary Anne so far forgot-herself as to begin, "Well, I do declare it's a—" at which juncture she fortunately recollected herself, and swallowing the rest went off to wash her hands before work.

"I am going to stay and help you with the work," observed Sister Rachel to Sister Ruth, seeing the latter look somewhat uneasy at the dissatisfaction which prevailed. "Sister Louise is not coming, she supposes there is a holiday as usual. Carrie, ring the work-bell;" and forthwith the bell clanged forth the unwelcome summons.

"Now look here," said Sister Rachel, when the children had returned from the lavatory with clean hands, and were standing in their places waiting to sing their "work hymn," as they called it, "don't let us sing our little hymn with cross faces, and grumpy hearts. Do you know I'm thinking we never had a better opportunity than this for keeping St. Michael's day properly."

"How so, Sister?" asked Rose, who had been wiping a few secret tears from her eyes. "We'd made up our minds for such fun; and we'd got our baskets ready for our nuts and blackberries. Oh, dear!" and Rose's sentence ended in a groan.

"Well I always thought," returned Sister Rachel, who was all the time busily sorting the work, "that the work of the holy Angels was to do what they were told, and that they were patterns of willing and cheerful obedience. Don't you remember the Bible says, 'are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' I am sure they must think looking after us very disagreeable sometimes. Yet they do it because they're told. I think the best way to keep the feast of the Chief of the Angels, would be to make our service as like that of his own bright spirits as possible. I mean so cheerful, and loving, without grumbling or sulks."

"We'll try, Sister," replied Carrie smiling, and Rose added, "Well to be sure, if any holy Angel should be near us to-day, we're not a very cheerful sight to look at, are we?"

"Quite horrid, I think," replied Sister Rachel; at which the children laughed. Her sprightly good-humour was infectious, and the hymn was sung very cheerfully after all.

"Sister," said Rose when this was over, "may I speak?" Work time being silence time, no one might speak except about their work without leave.

"Well, what is it?"

"Need we keep silence as if it was an ordinary working day?"

"Oh, my dears," exclaimed Sister Rachel in alarm, "I shall get

no work done if I have you chattering and babbling all round. But I'll tell you what," she added, anxious to soften the disappointment of the day, "we'll read aloud as usual, and as it isn't an ordinary working day, we'll read something amusing. What shall it be?"

A dozen eager hands were stretched for leave to speak, and then came a unanimous shout, "Beauty and the Beast, Sister, Beauty and the Beast."

"In the book Miss Mary left here last Monday, Sister," said Rose, "it's in the rostrum. Miss Mary began to read it; oh, Sister, may we finish it?"

Sister Rachel found the book, and handed it to Rose herself, bidding her read her very best, and show she was worthy of her prize on the 8th.

Perched on a chair in front of the workers, Rose and her hearers, in their interest in the Beauty's adventures, and their admiration of the Beast, (whom Rose in parenthesis, as she paused to turn over a leaf, pronounced "the dearest old darling") soon forgot their great Penfold grievance. Their sympathies for the ill-used monster on his third rejection by the Beauty were so strong that Charlotte involuntarily exclaimed, "Well, I do think she ought to have been ashamed of herself."

"Oh, but Charlotte," said Rose, who being reader thought herself dispensed from the rule of silence, "you surely wouldn't have married a beast?"

"Wouldn't I though!" replied Charlotte decidedly. "I mean," she said in answer to the general laugh, "a beast like this that was so kind and good, and so unhappy."

Rose was disposed to argue the point, but at Sister Rachel's suggestion that the story had better not be discussed till it was finished, she resumed her reading, and between their work and the story, the children's attention was so deeply engaged that no one heard the door open, or noticed that a pair of beautiful dark eyes were watching them with evident surprise. The owner of the eyes advanced softly into the room. She had a pretty brunette face, and a quantity of dark glossy hair, braided smoothly back, and arranged in thick plaits behind. She was very simply attired in a plain cotton dress, just short enough to show her neat little foot and ankle, and her only ornament, if ornament it could be called, was a small gold cross and chain. Beauty's fate was just then so absorbing that the new comer had almost reached the reader before any one was aware of her presence; then there was a sudden start, and all rose to their feet with a smothered exclamation half of surprise, half of joy, "Miss Mary!"

"Why what can you children be doing here at work this beautiful day, St. Michael's day? I thought you always went to Penfold woods on Michaelmas day."

Sister Rachel came forward and explained their melancholy circumstances.

"Oh dear, what a dreadful pity!" exclaimed the sympathising Miss Mary; this was balm and honey to the children, who thought themselves indeed objects of commiseration. "The Mother sent me to show the orphanage to Miss Melville," continued Miss Mary indicating a lady who now advanced into the room, "but I expected to find it empty. I never was so surprised. Dear, dear, only think! and such a beautiful day!"

"Now, Miss Mary," said Sister Rachel merrily, "don't you come trying to persuade us that we're poor unhappy creatures; because indeed we are not. We are reading Beauty and the Beast, and are all in love with the Beast; so pray let us finish his history."

"Oh, my book, I'm so glad you've got it. Well I won't interrupt you with my condolences; go on, Rose; if you will give me the key, Sister, Miss Melville and I will go and look at the dormitory."

She smiled and nodded, and took her bright face out of the room, and for a few moments the old disappointment returned; but this soon yielded again to the charms of the story; and when at length story and needlework came to an end Sister Rachel pronounced that they had done a good day's work and very well too.

"I think it has been a very good St. Michael's day," she said; and the children, happy in the consciousness of having done their best, assented merrily as they gave up their needles. This was hardly done, and they were yet in their places, when the door again opened and Miss Mary returned, but this time arm in arm with Sister Mabel!

"Here are the victims," said the merry laughing girl.

"They look such happy victims that I think they must have found some consolation for my forgetfulness. My dears, I quite forgot your walk to Penfold. You must forgive me, and I must make amends some day; what have you been doing?"

Sister Rachel answered for them. "My Sister, it was a disappointment at first; but they have been brave good girls. I think you will be pleased with their work. They have done very well. You see, Sister, being St. Michael's day, they thought it as well to keep it by cheerful obedience."

"I am pleased, I am very much pleased," replied Sister Mabel, her face and voice expressing her pleasure so evidently that the

children thought they had already a fair compensation for their lost walk.

"They ought to have a double good mark all round, Sister," said Miss Mary, "and," here she whispered, "you will let them do what they like for the rest of the evening, won't you, Sister?"

Sister Mabel answered aloud, "They shall have a double good mark all round, and they shall now do whatever they like till bedtime."

The children clapped their hands with delight.

"And Sister," continued Mary Neville drawing the Sister aside, "may I stay and play with them? I have a new game to teach them. I have papa's leave, and also the Mother's, I only want yours, dear Sister."

This was readily granted, and when the children understood that Miss Mary was to be their "Mistress of the revels," Penfold was entirely forgotten.

She had a rare art, this young girl, of throwing herself heart and soul into the amusements of these children, and yet at the same time keeping up their respect. In their wildest mirth none of them ever dared take any liberties with her. None ever felt any restraint with her, yet she could control the most unruly with a word. The children's admiration of her was unbounded, and their affection for her almost a romance. When she was herself a child, "little Miss Mary" as they called her then, was the impersonation to them of all that a child should be. Since she had attained the mature age of fifteen, though "little Miss Mary" no longer, she was still their model, their ideal of everything that was loveable, clever, and good.

And indeed Mary Neville was as fair a specimen of a priest's daughter as one could desire: overflowing with spirits, full of joyousness, and innocent mirth, and yet deeply religious, and unaffectedly devout; full of talent, yet utterly devoid of all conceit; admired and spoilt, yet without a touch of vanity, and entirely unselfish; so pure-minded that evil shrank away at her approach, and realizing to the very utmost in her own practice the Apostle's doctrine, so often insisted upon by her father, that loving service, the hearty sincere love which rejoices with those that do rejoice, and weeps with those that weep, is the only true manifestation of the life of God within us.

Sister Mabel was much tired by her journey, and, glad to leave the children under such good guardianship, retired to her own room to rest and read some letters. She had not been long so occupied, however, before her privacy was invaded by the indefatigable Miss Mary.

"I thought it was your knock," she said laughing, as this appa-

rition stood before her; "am I never to be free from you? What do you want now, you torment?"

"My dear Sister," replied Miss Mary dancing round her, "I am sure your natural sense of justice will cause you to feel that you owe these poor children some singular compensation for your extraordinary obliviousness of their rights and privileges on this beautiful cloudless Michaelmas day."

"I thought you were to be the 'singular compensation.'"

"For the walk, may be; but think of the nuts and blackberries they had counted on bringing home."

"Nasty unwholesome things, they are much better without them."

"Nasty! unwholesome! My dear Sister, have you forgotten your own childhood?"

"Oh no, I remember it very well."

"Then I'm sure you must also remember that nothing comes up to nuts and blackberries of one's own gathering; especially if one tears oneself almost to pieces in getting them."

"What do you want me to do? To tear the children to pieces, or to let you do so?"

"Ah, now we're coming to the point. Sister, as I stood on the bank just now, I saw old Mrs. Pilcher coming across the field way with her basket. Sister, she has the most delicious hardbake you ever tasted, and such capital sugar sticks and bull's-eyes. Now if she might, just this once, come into the playground, and if the children might buy some of her good things I should call that fair compensation for the nuts and blackberries."

"I could not think of such a thing," replied Sister Mabel. "I cannot bear children spending their little pocket moneys on pampering their appetites. Besides, these things are more unwholesome than even nuts and blackberries."

"They're not unwholesome, she makes them herself, I've seen her, they're excellent, I've tasted them, so has papa, ask him; and besides, the money wouldn't be wasted, for Mrs. Pilcher is a poor widow, and very respectable, and she must live, and how can she if nobody buys her sweets? and a sugar stick, just now and then, once in a way on high days and holidays, is a very excellent institution; ask papa."

"My dear, I cannot just now go down to St. Luke's to ask Mr. Neville's opinion of sugar sticks."

"Then you'll take it for granted, won't you, darling Sister? and you'll let old Goody Two-shoes come into the playground?"

"Mary, you'll wear me to a fiddlestring. I can really do no such thing. It would be against all rule. What would the Mother and Mr. Neville say?"

"The Mother! she'd let a whole regiment of hardbake women into the ground if I asked her," replied Mary saucily, "and as to papa I can twist him round my little finger."

"Impertinence! be off!" exclaimed Sister Mabel clapping her hands.

"Not without an answer, and that an affirmative," replied the mischievous girl, dropping on her knees by the Sister's side, and wrapping her arms closely round her. "It's my belief, you dearest of Sisters, that you lived mainly on sugar sticks when you were a little girl."

"Oh, Mary, Mary," laughed the victimised Sister, "you ought to be ashamed of such wheedling. But there, if you are really going to be my incubus till I consent, I see no other course open to me, but to hand over to you the government of the orphanage for the rest of the evening, and wash my hands of all responsibility."

"The very thing," cried Mary delighted, and giving the Sister a hearty kiss.

"But, remember you must answer to the Mother and Mr. Neville for such an extraordinary innovation."

"Oh, I'll answer," said Mary, skipping to the door. She paused when she reached it, saying mischievously, "Trust me to manage the Mother, and all the Sister Superiors as well; and as to papa—I'll take him home a sugar stick!"

She was off in a trice to the playground, and despatched a messenger after old Mrs. Pilcher, who shortly appeared with her basket of tempting wares.

Sister Mabel called from her window, and on Mary's running up said earnestly, "My dear love, don't let there be any lavish spending, any greediness."

"Oh, we won't be pigs, indeed," said Mary, and with this assurance Sister Mabel went back to her letters contented.

A real live hardbake woman selling sweets in the St. Mary's playground was indeed such an innovation, such an unprecedented wonder, that the children all agreed that it was quite worth the loss of the usual Michaelmas walk. Miss Mary was delighted with the pleasure she had caused, and though she insisted that no child should make extravagant purchases, Mrs. Pilcher, nevertheless, reaped a fair harvest. Lydia, however, could not be prevailed upon to break up her bright shilling, till she saw little Minnie looking longingly at a sugar stick which she had no money to buy; and the child was so delighted when Lydia placed it in her hands, that the little girl did not regret having exchanged her pretty bright coin for a handful of cumbersome coppers.

The children had finished their bargains, and Mrs. Pilcher having

curtseyed her acknowledgments, was walking towards the gate, when Martha said, "Why I told Mrs. Pilcher I wanted a pen'orth of bull's-eyes, and here's only a ha'porth. Oh, dear, she's too far off now for me to catch. But I should have liked the whole dozen."

"Give me the halfpenny and I will run after her," said one of the girls turning round suddenly.

"Thank you!" replied Martha, and seizing the halfpenny, away ran Isabella.

Meantime Jemima had followed Lydia. "Would you mind lending me two pence as you have changed your shilling?" said she, "Bessie and I have had no sweets at all. I'll be sure and pay you back next friends-day."

Lydia was about to comply instantly, when Miriam, who had overheard Jemima's request, stopped her. "No, no; no borrowing, Jemima, you know Sister Mabel has forbidden it. How do you know you will be able to pay Lydia back next friends-day?"

Jemima looked very angry.

"What is the matter?" asked Miss Mary.

Miriam explained, adding—"Is not borrowing a very bad plan, Miss Mary?"

"Oh, very bad," replied she, "but have Jemima and Bessie really had no sweets?"

"None, ma'am," replied they despondently.

"Oh, that won't do at all. Have any others gone without? whoever has had no sweets hold up her hand."

Two or three hands were held up accordingly. Miss Mary counted them, and then saying, "I will get you some," darted across the playground to catch Mrs. Pilcher. Halfway across she met Isabella returning. "Isabella," said she, "run quickly, stop Mrs. Pilcher, I want her." But as Isabella only stood still and stared confusedly, Miss Mary, supposing she did not hear, and in too great a hurry to repeat her request, pursued her course, and beckoned back the old woman who was already beyond the gate.

She expended sixpence on her purchase, and then asked Mrs. Pilcher if she could give her change for a shilling.

"Surely, ma'am," replied the old woman, handing her a sixpence.

"Is this a good one, Mrs. Pilcher?" asked Mary.

"I took it from one of they young lasses, ma'am," she answered.

"The little girl assured me it was only old."

"It's a queer looking article," thought Mary; "but if it should happen to be bad I can better bear the loss than old Goody. I dare say it's all right," she said aloud. "Good evening, Mrs. Pilcher."

"And good evening to you, Miss, and many of them," replied

the old woman ; muttering as she passed the gate, " Ah, blessings on her sweet face for getting me in there ; I haven't had so good a sale these ten days."

" Look at this wretched old sixpence, Carrie," said Miss Mary, after she had distributed her sweets, " Mrs. Pilcher said she got it from one of the children, so I felt bound in honour to take it ; but I doubt whether it is passable."

Carrie turned very pale. She took the sixpence in her hand, but did not speak.

" Carrie, what is the matter with you ? you are faint, sit down."

And Carrie obeyed and sat down on the ground, for indeed she could not stand. " Don't move, Miss Mary," she said, catching hold of her dress. " Don't move, don't speak, stand before me. I shall be all right in a minute." Mary complied, wondering, but frightened. " I'm better now," said Carrie presently, rising as she spoke, " come into the house with me, Miss Mary. Will you please show this sixpence to Sister Mabel ?"

" Carrie," exclaimed Mary, the cause of the girl's agitation flashing suddenly upon her, " is this the sixpence Charlotte stole ?"

" Not Charlotte, not Charlotte," replied Carrie earnestly ; " but only Mrs. Pilcher now can tell who did."

CHAPTER XXII.

AT LAST.

THE long lost sixpence was found. There could be no doubt of it ; for there were the M and S plainly scratched on either side. Found at last ! and the news of the discovery spread like wildfire through the playground, though no one knew who first brought the tidings. All sports, all merriment ceased at once. The children looked on one another in silence, with awe-struck faces. The agitation of Jemima and Hetty was so apparent that all doubts centred on them ; but no one expressed any opinion ; only the children drew off from the two suspected ones and left them alone. Isabella did so too, and looked quite calm and composed. She had been greatly alarmed when Miss Mary called upon her to stop Mrs. Pilcher. But how she had been found out she did not know. The whole time Mrs. Pilcher had been in the playground she had carried the sixpence in her hand seeking an opportunity of getting rid of it unobserved ; but the children crowded too thickly round to render

this possible, and she had given up all hopes of attaining her object when Martha's exclamation about her bull's-eyes placed it unexpectedly within her reach.

But had any one seen her haggling with Mrs. Pilcher about the sixpence? She had had some difficulty in persuading the old woman to take it; was Miss Mary calling the sweet-seller back on account of any suspicions her delay may have occasioned?

All these questions passed rapidly through Isabella's mind, but having recovered from her first panic she maintained an unruffled composure. Not so Jemima and Hetty. They could not conceal their terror. Nothing more, however, was heard that evening about the sixpence. Miss Mary did not return; and the children dispersed to bed very quietly; but just as they were leaving the chapel, Sister Mabel signed to them to remain in their places, and then formally announced that the sixpence had been found, but that nothing more could be known about it till the next day.

Sister Mabel's voice sounded unlike her own, and the children had never seen her look so pale and sad. She sat down as soon as she had finished speaking, and leant her head on her hand. There were many wakeful eyes that night in the dormitory. Charlotte could not sleep for excitement. Now at length her innocence was about to be established, but at another's expense. She longed for, yet dreaded the morrow. Isabella, too, lay awake, arranging her plans. Discovery was now certain, but she would fall in her own way. Lydia too was very wakeful; divided between her joy at Charlotte's approaching acquittal, and anxiety as to whether the sixpence would be restored to herself; Jemima's and Hetty's countenances showed next morning that they had passed the greater part of the night in tears; but they took heart in the reflection that the sixpence had not been found in their possession, and that whatever their punishment might be Isabella would get the worst of it.

Lessons dragged heavily along next day, even the teachers were preoccupied. The warning for all to keep their places when school was over was hardly needed, for nobody thought of moving.

Presently they all rose, as the Superior, accompanied by Mr. Neville, and the old sweet-seller entered the room. At sight of the latter Isabella's effrontery once more forsook her, and she sat down, concealing herself behind her companions. Jemima and Hetty recovered courage. Mrs. Pilcher could have nothing to witness against them, for they had not been among her customers. Sister Mabel could scarcely conceal her agitation. She stood leaning against her rostrum, and before her stood the Chaplain and the Superior.

"Charlotte Armstrong, stand forward," said Mr. Neville sternly, and Charlotte promptly but tremblingly obeyed. "Was this the girl who gave you that marked sixpence, Mrs. Pilcher?"

"Oh no, sir, if you please, sir," replied the old woman, "it was a shorter than her."

Sister Mabel heaved a sigh of relief, but her cheeks flushed painfully as she looked towards Jemima and Hetty, whose agitation on the previous evening she, also, had observed.

"Are you sure you should know the girl again?" asked the Superior.

"Quite sure, ma'am," replied Mrs. Pilcher, "for she give me that sixpence just afore Miss Mary called me back for to buy some sugar sticks and bull's-eyes; and there wasn't none other girl anigh us, as we stood close agin the gate, and first she wants for to buy a ha'porth of bull's-eyes for one of the girls, she says; and she pays for them with a ha'penny; and then she says, all in a hurry like, as she wants something for herself, and she chooses threepen'orth of sweets very quick and gives me that there sixpence; and I says, 'But this ain't a good one,' I says; and she says, 'Oh, it's only very old, and as how she hadn't ne'er another.' And so I didn't like to be hard on the child, and I took it; but I kep it in my hand; and when Miss Mary wanted change for a shilling I just give it her because it was handy like." Here Mrs. Pilcher curtsied profoundly and deprecatingly to Mr. Neville, as if she feared he might resent her having passed off doubtful coin upon his daughter.

He only observed, however, "Well, if you are so sure you would know the girl again, of course you can point her out now."

"In course I can, sir," replied Mrs. Pilcher; and she proceeded to scrutinise the ranks before her. All eyes were once more turned towards Jemima and Hetty, but Mrs. Pilcher's tale had wonderfully reassured them, and they did not look more disturbed than their companions. Isabella had stood up again lest her sitting posture should attract attention, but not being very tall, and in one of the back rows, she was pretty well screened by her companions; and as she, moreover, stood as short as she could, and kept her head down, Mrs. Pilcher did not detect her. Mr. Neville began to grow impatient.

"Sit down, children," said the Superior, seeing the old woman was confused by the numbers; "now," she added, when they had obeyed, "pass between the forms, Mrs. Pilcher, and see if you can find her."

But as the girls seated themselves Isabella's eyes had involuntarily turned for an instant towards the old woman, and she immediately recognised her.

"That's she," she exclaimed, "that's she, sir; that's she, ladies; that's the girl that give me the marked sixpence."

"Isabella!" the exclamation came not only from all her companions but from Sister Mabel. Mr. Neville turned and looked at the latter, and speaking in a tone audible only to her, said, "And this is the girl you have persisted in keeping here in spite of all cautions, sowing evil broadcast, no doubt, all this time, among the others."

Sister Mabel did not reply. She stood motionless with her eyes fixed on the ground. The Superior now spoke. "There is yet more to be told. This has been no ordinary theft. It's extreme iniquity has been, not only that it has been deliberately denied; but it has been fixed upon another with a malice at which one shudders. For two full months has Charlotte Armstrong been looked upon coldly as a thief and a liar."

Again Mr. Neville turned and looked sternly at Sister Mabel; had he known how her heart was aching he would have pitied her; but she made no sign. Whilst the Superior spoke Isabella met her gaze unflinchingly; and she now replied in her usual mincing tone of affectation. "I did not take this sixpence, reverend Mother. Jemima Watts flicked it off the nail where Lydia had hung it, that night when we went to bed;" here Jemima actually screamed; but Isabella not heeding her continued, "and she passed it on next morning to Hetty, and I knew nothing at all about it till the day of the thunderstorm, and then they asked me to take care of it for them; and as Charlotte's workbox was standing by with the key in it, I thought if I ran the risk of taking care of the sixpence Charlotte might as well mind the ribbon; so Hetty," she laid great emphasis on this, "opened the box, and cut the ribbon and put it in. I told no lies when I said I had not taken the sixpence, or touched Charlotte's box," and Isabella looked round complacently as much as to say, none of you could have managed so cleverly as that.

The girl's utter shamelessness was so shocking that her speech was followed by a dead silence, only broken by the passionate sobs and protestations of Jemima and Hetty. It was all through Isabella, they declared again and again; they would have told long ago but for her. "She had only hid the sixpence for Jemmy's sake," whined Hetty, "and she would never have thought of putting the ribbon into Charlotte's box if Isabella had not told her to." "It would never have come into her head," sobbed Jemima, "to have touched the sixpence if Isabella had not been always bothering her for money, and threatening her if she did not give her some."

"Threatening you, with what?" asked the Superior sternly.

"To tell of her," Isabella answered composedly; and then, determined to show no quarter to her wretched accomplices, she quietly mentioned Jemima's theft of Miriam's shilling, which every one, including Miriam herself, had always supposed to have been lost out of a hole in her own pocket; and pitilessly enumerated other offences both of Hetty's and Jemima's till Mr. Neville stopped her.

"Enough of this, unhappy girl," he said. "I say nothing to you, for you have proved that words are useless. To your miserable companions in sin I say, let them take heed lest the day come when the LORD may cease to speak to them because His words would be useless. You two girls are crying now, and protesting now that you are sorry for the shameful past, but remember, repentance is only proved by deeds. Here you will remain no longer. Amidst new scenes, new companions, new teachers, I pray you may indeed bring forth fruits of repentance. Sister Mabel, let these girls be immediately removed from the orphanage to the mother house. Isabella Wheeler, Jemima Watts, and Hester Dale, are expelled."

Isabella had been so certain of her fate that it gave her but a slight shock to hear it definitely pronounced, besides, she had the consolation of dragging Jemima and Hetty down with her; but these last were thunderstruck; they had looked for punishment—severe punishment—but expulsion! they had never thought it would come to that.

The Superior seeing how utterly upset Sister Mabel was, gave her directions to Sister Ruth, who advancing towards the culprits signed to them to leave the schoolroom by the door leading into the long cloister. Isabella obeyed at once, and made her curtsies to the Mother and Mr. Neville as collectedly as if nothing had happened, but Jemima and Hetty were almost unmanageable, crying, screaming and imploring. There was no help for it however, they were obliged to follow Isabella; and during their exit Mr. Neville again turned to Sister Mabel.

"A goodly crop of weeds may grow from one tare," said he frowning. "I do not envy you the task before you. How will you ever be able to get to the bottom of all the secret evil this wretched girl has worked?"

Sister Mabel had hitherto been standing, leaning against her rostrum, heart-stricken with this very thought; but when it was thus reduced to words, and shaped into so severe a question, it became well-nigh unendurable; she felt absolutely scared by the hidden mischief that had just been laid bare before her; a faintness came over her, and creeping into the rostrum she sat down, covering her face with her hands. Then for the first time Mr. Neville saw her distress, and was sorry he had added to it.

"There is another act of justice to be performed," said the Superior. "Sister Mabel, have you Charlotte's medal?"

The Sister opened her rostrum and drawing it out, gave it silently to the Superior, resuming immediately her former attitude. The Superior spoke a few words to Mr. Neville as she placed the medal in his hands.

"Little Armstrong, come here," he said. And Charlotte came, thrilled by the sound of that well-remembered name which spoke to her of kindly interest; thankful for the clearance of her own good name; yet startled and distressed by what she had just heard and witnessed.

"You have had a sharp trial, my child," said the Chaplain very kindly. "There are few things harder to bear than undeserved shame. You have this one comfort, that you have been counted worthy to suffer trial and temptation, and to drink of the same cup of unjust blame with blessed Mary."

Charlotte curtseyed and smiled through her tears; but her heart was heavy with grief for her expelled companions. Mr. Neville threw the red ribbon round her neck and added, "We restore to Charlotte Armstrong her good-conduct medal and former place in the school, with a regret, in which I am sure we all join, that she has so long been under blame unjustly."

Very happy were her companions at this public recognition of Charlotte's innocence, but they had been too greatly shocked to give any audible expression to their satisfaction.

Charlotte, deeply touched by the Chaplain's words, longed to say that no one need regret her disgrace, as she felt she had deserved it; but she did not like to speak, and only looked pleadingly towards the Superior. When however, Mr. Neville laid his hand kindly on her head saying, "My poor little girl, we have unintentionally been very unjust to you; you must forgive us, I for one am heartily sorry"—she uttered a little cry, exclaiming in a frightened voice, "Oh, reverend Father, oh, sir; pray, pray don't say such words;" and dropping on her knees at the Superior's feet, she hid her face in her habit imploring with many tears forgiveness for her own pride and petulance.

"It is forgiven, it is forgotten, my dear," replied the Mother, "do not cry." But the fountain of Charlotte's tears could not be easily staunched. Such words coming from the venerable white-haired priest had pierced her to the quick. Never before had she so realised her own pride and passion. She hated herself; there was no humiliation she would not now thankfully undergo if by any means she could make atonement for it; "they may forgive," thought she, "but I will never forgive myself." The restoration of her medal

gave her no sensible feeling of satisfaction; it rather humbled her the more. "I am not worthy, I am not worthy," was the sincere cry of her heart.

After a few severe yet kindly words to the children Mr. Neville left the orphanage. The Superior accompanied him to the door and then returned and dismissed Mrs. Pilcher, and afterwards the children, who slowly and sadly went out into the playground. Sister Mabel still sat with her face hidden in her hands. They saw how stricken she was, and it impressed them all the more with the heinousness of the sin which had been that day discovered; and added doubly to the sense of shame and grief which prevented Charlotte rejoicing in the restoration of her medal.

When the schoolroom was empty the Superior approached her, and gently touching her hand, said, "Sister Ruth must attend to the dinners to-day, my daughter; come now with me into your room. I cannot have you blaming yourself in this way for what has happened," she said when they had shut themselves in; "you did your best, my daughter."

"Oh, Mother," exclaimed Sister Mabel rising and pacing the room in her agitation, "I have failed; miserably, miserably failed. In my mistaken efforts to save one girl I have lost three; and as Mr. Neville says, who knows what amount of hidden evil has been, all this while, sown broadcast up and down among my children? How can I ever find it out? How can I counteract it? How deep the seeds must have been sown to have cropped up so strongly. And to think that this evil has been growing up night and day all around us, and that I have never known, never seen, never suspected it! Mother, take the charge of these orphan children from me. I am not fit for it. I have fancied all was well with them; I have secretly plumed myself on what I imagined my success with them, and it has come to this! Oh, what a miserable failure!"

"When you can think all this over more quietly you will be the first to acknowledge that when persons begin to plume themselves on their success in any work undertaken for the glory of God, the greatest mercy that can happen to them is that they should fail."

"Ah, as far as concerns myself I acknowledge that now, my Mother, but these poor children! My benefit is at their expense."

"Do not grow morbid in this matter, my daughter; be as severe as you please with yourself, but be just also. You committed a great error of judgment in persuading the Father and me to allow Isabella to remain, but it was not more than that, and it is one you are not likely to fall into again. As to the seeds of evil sown broadcast, of course it is our duty to prevent such a thing by every means in our power, yet if we find that the tares have been sown

in spite of our best endeavours, we must not despair as if some new and strange trial had befallen us. Are there not tares in every field, my daughter?"

"But that I—I living here in the very midst of the children should never have seen these special tares, my Mother!" exclaimed Sister Mabel.

"There is the more reason to be thankful for any crisis which brings them to light. My dear child, let us be thankful that the evil has cropped up so that we have been able to discern it. There is hidden evil everywhere, it is a great mercy when it comes to light. If we cannot uproot it, we can at least counteract, or guard against it."

Sister Mabel sighed again, but not quite so despondently.

Later in the day Mr. Neville sent her a slip of paper on which was written, "Rightly used failures lead to true success."

She took this as a token that he was not hopelessly displeased with her, and found some small consolation in it. Still she could not throw off the depression which hung upon her all that day, and the children not only sympathised with, but shared in her grief. They could not play, they could not think of anything but the sin of their three companions and the tremendous fact of their summary expulsion; Bessie, and one or two others, who had been a good deal in their company, sat apart, silent and awestruck, and were rather avoided by the rest as having, most likely, been mixed up with many of their misdemeanours.

Just before bedtime Sister Mabel came out of her room. She had evidently been crying, and several times put her hand to her head as if it ached. Carrie, who watched her, placed a chair for her in the garden and coaxed her to occupy it, which she presently did; and Charlotte crept softly after her and sitting down at her feet laid her head in her lap. Carrie left them so, and returned to the schoolroom to finish something upon which she had been engaged. This was nothing else than sewing a fresh piece of ribbon on to Lydia's sixpence. This time it was a narrow blue ribbon, however, not red. She called the little girl when she had finished, and held it out to her with a smile.

"Oh, thank you, dear Carrie," said Lydia, "but," hesitating, "I don't think I can wear it any more."

"Why not?" asked Carrie.

"It has been such an unlucky sixpence, it has brought nothing but trouble."

"The *sixpence* did not bring the trouble, Lydia."

"Of course not, I know that; but it will make me think of disagreeable things."

"What things?"

"How I deceived Sister Ruth that morning," sighed Lydia, "when I ran out of the working class without her knowing it; and tried to break the dormitory rules; and pushed and hurt Charlotte, who was only doing her duty."

"Then I'll tell you what," said Carrie, "if this sixpence reminds you of all that, it's the 'luckiest' sixpence that ever was made. And look here, when you wore it before, you did so as Mark's keepsake,—as a remembrance of Mark. Now, if I were you, I'd wear it as a keepsake of our Lady, in remembrance of Blessed Mary."

"An old sixpence!" exclaimed Lydia in surprise.

"Why not? a keepsake's a keepsake, it doesn't signify what it is. Some people would laugh at you for wearing an old sixpence in remembrance of your brother; but it did remind you of your brother for all that."

"Oh, yes!" assented Lydia heartily.

"Well, why shouldn't this sixpence keep Blessed Mary in your mind as much as it used to remind you of Mark? This M. S. you scratched for Mark Staunton, why shouldn't the S. stand now for 'Saint,' and the M. for 'Mary?'"

Lydia listened with growing interest.

"And the very ribbon," continued Carrie; "I hadn't another piece of red, only this narrow dark blue,—blue's the colour of 'truth,' you know, and our Lady's special colour, why shouldn't that remind you that if we would be blessed with Blessed Mary, we must be so *true*, that we mustn't even *think* a false, untrue, unfaithful thought; you know the 51st Psalm says that GOD requires 'truth in the *inward* parts.' Sister Mabel says that means that it is not enough only to keep from telling lies, and hiding our faults, but that we must be so *true*, that we should never have anything to hide, that the worst of all deceit is seeming better than we are. And she told us a story, which she said was written by a French lady, (who was governess to some little princesses,) to show that people shouldn't always say what they think, but Sister said she thought it would have been better if the moral had been that we shouldn't have thoughts which we should be ashamed of anybody knowing."

"Oh, do tell me the story," said Lydia.

"There wouldn't be nearly time now," said Carrie, "it's almost time for me to ring the oratory bell. But it was about a palace which was built by a fairy, and he called it the Palace of Truth. And it was enchanted, and every one who came into it was obliged to think out loud, without knowing that they did so. And you may fancy what a mess everybody got into. I remember there was one woman who was very vain, and always trying to attract atten-

tion, and she, without knowing it of course, let out all her tricks to make people notice her, and how she screamed if a mouse ran across the room because she thought it made her seem interesting."

"What fun it must have been," observed Lydia.

"Yes, it was funny," replied Carrie smiling; "but Sister bade us think whether it would be a laughing matter if we were obliged to speak out every thought that passed through our minds. And she said we had better, each one, ask ourselves this question, 'should I have dared to live in the Palace of Truth?' and she said if we wouldn't have dared, that it would have been because we had not that *inward* truth which GOD requires, but that however fair and true we might seem to those about us, we must feel that we'd got something false in us, hidden away somewhere, which we couldn't bear that any one should see; and so we kept it out of sight, forgetting that it was quite impossible to hide it away from GOD, that He'd have it dragged out to light at the Last Day, 'when GOD shall judge the *secrets* of men,' as St. Paul says. And then she warned us to take care that we'd none of us any secrets we wouldn't like told then, and that wouldn't bear His Judgment."

Lydia looked grave, and after a few minutes' consideration observed, "If I'd been in the Palace of Truth that morning, Carrie, I should have had to think out loud how I could best cheat Sister Ruth, and not let her know I didn't get up when I was called, and how I meant to break the dormitory rule without her knowing anything about it. Oh, dear!"

"Yes, it is 'Oh, dear!'" replied Carrie; "and remember, Lydia, we do always think 'out loud' to GOD."

Lydia seemed struck.

Carrie took up the blue ribbon on which the sixpence was suspended. "Don't you think," she said, "this would be a 'lucky sixpence' indeed if it reminded you always of that?"

"Yes, Carrie," replied the little girl, "it will indeed, and I'll wear it always. And I shan't take it off at night as I used to do," she added, as she passed the ribbon round her neck, and hid the little coin in her bosom; "but when I'm lying awake I'll keep the sixpence here upon my heart and think of Blessed Mary, that she had no secrets to hide, eh, Carrie?"

"No indeed! the HOLY SPIRIT had looked her through and through, and what did He Himself witness of her? 'As the Lily,'—the pure, white, spotless lily—'as the *lily* among thorns, so is My Love among the daughters;' and then again, 'A garden enclosed is My Sister, My Spouse; a Spring shut up, a Fountain sealed.' I think that's so beautiful. Only think of the Eye of GOD looking into our sweet Lady's heart and finding it like a lovely

little garden, full of delightful flowers; or like a sweet little crystal spring, full of the purest water. Lydia, our hearts should be 'fountains sealed;' the LORD made them quite pure in our Baptism, and set His Seal upon them; it's our fault if we break His Seal, and let nasty things get in and defile them."

"What do you mean by GOD's Seal?" asked Lydia.

"The Sign of the Cross," replied Carrie, "which was marked upon our forehead at our Baptism, that is GOD's Seal. And we break it, and let nasty things into the fountains of our hearts when we forget that He has made us 'holy,' and allow any kind of wicked thought to creep into our hearts and defile them."

"But we cannot all be as 'holy' as Blessed Mary," objected Lydia.

"Dear Lydia, what makes us 'holy' is it not the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD? Could our Lady have been 'holy' without the gift of His grace? And you know, Lydia, we have our LORD's most certain promise, which can't possibly fail, that our FATHER Which is in Heaven will always give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

"But, Carrie," said Lydia fearfully, "suppose we have forgotten; suppose we have, as you call it, broken GOD's Seal, and let nasty things into our hearts; I mean," she said, and her eyes filled with tears, "wicked thoughts that we should be ashamed to think out loud, or let any one know anything about, what are we to do then, Carrie?"

"We must get rid of them as fast as possible. But we can't do that by ourselves. We must call very earnestly upon GOD the HOLY SPIRIT to come to our help; and to drive them out, and sanctify us again; and upon the Holy and Blessed Trinity to seal up our hearts once more. And then we must watch very carefully for fear the Seal should break again; we should put our finger on it now and then," added Carrie smiling, "to make sure that it's quite sound."

"What can you mean?" asked Lydia.

"Why, it's a very good plan indeed when any bad thought is creeping and crawling about near us, or comes quite suddenly when we're not watching and dabs against us, to make the sign of the Cross secretly upon our forehead, or on our heart, and repeat the Invocation, 'In the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST;' the bad thought is almost sure to go then; the Seal is tight, there is no admittance for it."

"But, Carrie, you only say it's 'almost sure;' isn't it *quite* sure to go then?"

"No, it's just possible it may keep coming back, and give us a deal of trouble. Then we must keep on each time doing the same

thing till it does go. It's quite sure to take itself off at last. If it bothers us very much we might say, as we make the sign of the Cross, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' and then repeat the Invocation. There's no fear of the nasty thought getting into our hearts if we're quite determined that by God's grace it shan't."

"But doesn't it get into our hearts every time we think it?"

"No, I remember Mr. Neville preaching a sermon about that; and indeed what I have been saying are his words, not mine. He said it was no sin of ours if a wicked thought came and showed its ugly face at the door of our hearts. We only sinned if we didn't think it ugly, but took pleasure in it, and opened the door of our heart to it and let it come in. But if we were quite disgusted with it, and barred the door against it with the sign of the Cross, and in the Name and Strength of the Blessed Trinity, we were quite safe; and it didn't signify how long the ugly thing stood there, or how often it came back, as long as we were always doing our very best to drive it away."

"But how do we know when we have let it in, Carrie?"

"When we have taken any pleasure in it," replied the young monitor; "when we have listened to it, and talked with it, without being at all disgusted, or thinking we were doing any harm."

"Carrie, I want to tell you something," said Lydia, after a short pause, during which Carrie consulted the clock.

"Tell me to-morrow," replied Carrie, "in seven minutes I must ring the bell for prayers."

"But I want to say this before we go to prayers, and I can say it in seven minutes, I'm sure. Carrie, do you know when I first lost my sixpence, I thought such dreadful thoughts of Charlotte; there's no doubt I let them right into my heart. I thought I hated her, Carrie, and I wished she was sent away." The tears streamed fast down Lydia's cheeks. Carrie, for all answer, put her arms round her, and kissed her. "And, Carrie, I think this is almost worse, but do you know I have twice this afternoon felt so glad Isabella was gone, and that it served Jemima and Hetty quite right, and what a much better girl I am than they are."

"You won't hate people again in a hurry, I'm sure," said Carrie soothingly; "you'll hope the best of them as long as you can; and then, if you find they're really bad, you'll be sorry for them, and pray for them. And you will pray that you may never compare yourself with other people. Sister Mabel says there's nothing more silly; because we shan't be let off in the Day of Judgment because some one else has sinned as much or more than we have; we shall only be judged for our own sins, and by our own opportunities. *We mustn't* say or think, 'After all I'm much better than so-and-so;

but we should ask ourselves, 'can I bear any comparison with the Saints?' and their Model was the LORD JESUS Himself; and if we can't be compared even to the very least of the Saints, how ridiculous to be priding ourselves on being better than some one who wasn't a Saint at all."

Here Carrie cast another glance at the clock, and walked towards the door to ring the oratory bell. Lydia followed her with her arm round her waist, and, as Carrie stopped to kiss her, whispered, "I wonder whether I shall ever be a 'Child of Mary?'"

"Sister Mabel would say," replied Carrie smiling, "that those are the true 'Children of Mary'."

'Who out of sight do all that's right,
One rule for darkness and for light.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DECISION.

"I SUPPOSE, my Mother," said Sister Mabel, about three days after the occurrences mentioned in the previous chapter, "there is no hope of Jemima and Hetty being spared expulsion this once?" Sister Mabel spoke hesitatingly, in a tone of inquiry, and as if she feared the reply.

"No, my dear," replied the Superior decidedly, "there is 'no hope,' as you call it, at all. It would be most undesirable." Then, seeing Sister Mabel looked downcast, she continued, "Mr. Neville and I have discussed this matter carefully, and we are quite agreed that what may seem mercy to one, is very often—most often where numbers are concerned—cruelty to the many. It is absolutely necessary for the sake of those who have been injured by the bad example of those girls that the evil should be removed promptly, those that remain will take warning by this. You see it has been a great mistake keeping Isabella so long when you *knew* her presence in the orphanage was dangerous and mischievous to others."

"Mother, I always hoped I should have been able to touch some chord in her heart," pleaded Sister Mabel, "she was so entirely orphaned, so friendless, and utterly homeless; why should not I have patience? I am sure I had patience shown to me."

The Superior took her hand, and pressed it caressingly. "Dearest daughter," said she, affectionately, "here is your mistake, you sacrificed many for the sake of one. You had no right to risk their

moral welfare for the *chance* of a possible amendment in one wicked girl."

Sister Mabel sighed. "But if she had been sent away there would have been no chance of her amendment at all."

"You cannot be sure of that. One thing is certain; that there is nothing more petrifying than for any that have been hardening themselves under the influences of religious teaching to remain under those influences. You look surprised, my daughter, but Mr. Neville will tell you, more plainly than I can, that such persons will, under those circumstances, *never* soften. Their best chance is to be cut off from them altogether; then, possibly, in after years, the holy lessons which were to them mere empty sounds, may return as strains of long-forgotten music—household melodies—softening the heart, and turning it back towards home."

Sister Mabel still looked doubtful.

"How often, how very often," continued the Superior, "do we find this exemplified in the case of the wicked children of holy parents. They have steeled themselves against holy teaching, and that being the case, no appeal can reach them. They have been so used to the *sound* of holy words, that they are to them only words—mere sounds—and nothing more. But after such children have left their homes, and been cast among scenes the least likely, as *we* should say, to induce repentance and faith, the seed that had been scattered, and, as was supposed, wasted on the hard heart, has germinated at last. Some storm of life, some great shock, or sharp trial, broke up the ground at last, and then the seed dropped in. In ancient times we have the remarkable example of Manasseh, the horribly wicked son of the righteous Hezekiah; in later times of our own glorious Saint Augustine; and in quite modern days the conversion of the Calvinist, John Newton. His Calvinism we may call an 'accident' of the times in which he lived, and the teaching • to which he was exposed; but his conversion from a reckless and wicked life to one of unaffected piety, was, as he says himself, brought about by the *remembrance* of early religious teaching springing up within a heart broken and softened by the grace-giving dispensations of God. You have scattered the seed, my child, faithfully, I know; but *you* could not give the softening grace necessary to make that seed germinate. Now leave the matter to faith. Trust these children prayerfully to the Great Husbandman. The seed is at present all on the surface; how do you know but what their future circumstances, by breaking up the crust of their hearts, may make a way for that seed to drop in where it will at least be safe till the Dew of God's Grace falls upon it and makes it really live. Of one *thing* be certain; the crust of indifference would never break here,

the daily even tenor of their lives precludes all hope of that. When once indifference has become as habit, nothing but a *blow* will break it. You tell me both *Jemima* and *Hetty* have expressed themselves deeply penitent. It is just possible that the *blow* of their expulsion may have already produced a 'breaking up' effect; and the fear of their punishment may produce the same effect on others over whose hearts this crust was forming. But the surest way to undo so happy a result, would be to cancel the punishment. Unfulfilled threats are worse than useless, and the most certain promoters of indifference."

"Did I understand you that *Jemima* is to return to her poor old grandfather?" asked *Sister Mabel*.

"Yes, and *Hetty* to her sister, *Mrs. Brody*. *Isabella* being friendless and homeless, we have procured admission for her, as you will see by this letter, into the small reformatory school at *S*—; but neither *Jemima's* grandfather, nor *Hetty's* sister, can expect us to keep these children at the expense of all the rest; we have done what we could for them, now they must do what they can."

Possibly *Sister Mabel* thought this would be little enough; she paused a few moments, read the letter the Superior had put into her hand, and then said, "And I may not see them once more?"

"No, it would do no good. *Sister Ruth* will continue to attend to them till they are out of the house. She has informed *Jemima* and *Hetty*, by my desire, that they will not see you again. I suppose you know *Isabella* did not ask to see you."

Yes, *Sister Mabel* knew that. She would have liked to have seen the others, who had asked for her, very much; but as that was not to be, she quietly acquiesced in the Superior's decision, and presently returned to her own domain.

Here *Mary Anne* had been doing her best, at all events, to 'break the crust'—already cracking—of one girl's indifference. The good-natured monitor had noticed *Bessie's* depression, and, guessing the cause of it, had that evening taken her work and sat down, as it were undesignedly, beside the gloomy little maid who, joining in no sports, kept aloof from her companions in a corner of the schoolroom.

After a few cheerful remarks which met but a sulky response, *Mary Anne* said suddenly and earnestly, "I'm sorry and yet I'm glad to see you so cast down, *Bessie*."

"Cast down?" repeated *Bessie* angrily; "I'm not cast down."

"Yes you are, and I like you all the better for it. You are sad, because your old companions, whom you've played with so often, will leave the Home for ever this evening. For aught I know they may be gone already. It's natural you should be sorry for them."

It was no use Bessie pretending any longer she did not care; she laid her head on a desk and sobbed.

"And there's another thing that casts you down, Bessie; and I like you all the better for that too. You're sad because you think you ought to be punished too; you don't like to get off free yourself when you know you've been almost as naughty as they."

This was a random shot of Mary Anne's, spoken only on suspicion, but it told with an effect that surprised her.

"Has Isabella told of me?" Bessie almost gasped, face and lips turning white as she spoke.

"No, dear, nobody's told; but every one must know this much, that Isabella's *friends* must have heavy consciences; and yours must be heavy indeed if you feel yourself in her power."

Bessie turned away that Mary Anne might not see her face. "Now, I'll tell you what," said the sailor's daughter, "I wouldn't go sneaking about dreading lest I should be found out, no, not for chests of gold. Neither would I go a day longer letting Sister Mabel think I was better than I really am. I'll just tell you what I'd do. The moment she came back from the 'Mother House' I'd follow her to her room, and I'd say, 'Sister, I deserve to be sent away too; for I've done all these wicked things I'm going to tell you;' and then I'd tell her every wicked thing I'd done, and every wicked thing I'd said; not telling of others, you understand, or making matters out worse for those that are gone, but just all my own wickedness, and nothing else."

Bessie rose with an exclamation of dismay. "And be sent away too! oh, no, no, Mary Anne, I could not do that."

Mary Anne threw down her work and came round to her. "Do you think so ill of Sister Mabel as that she'd be hard and cold to you, Bessie, when you wanted to begin a fresh life? Do you think she'd not be loving when you showed her all your heart; wouldn't she give her best advice as to how you might get straight after having gone so crooked. Oh, trust her, trust her, Bessie. Go to her as if she were your mother; go to her and tell her everything; go to her as she bids us go to. God when we ask Him to forgive us; and that's as children to a father, you know, in love and confidence."

Mary Anne had folded her arms round her little companion, and Bessie clung to her, but repeated, "Oh, I daren't, I daren't, Mary Anne, you don't know."

"No, and I don't want to. But Bessie, wouldn't you give the world if this heavy burden was lifted off you, and you knew you were forgiven, and that you might begin quite fresh?"

"Oh, yes, yes," sobbed Bessie. "But oh, I dare not!"

At this moment Sister Mabel, returning with a heavy heart, entered the schoolroom. "Here she is," whispered Mary Anne; "now don't stop to think about it, go to her at once. Sister," she added aloud, "Bessie wants to speak to you alone."

"Bessie, what's the matter, my dear?"

"Oh, Sister, Sister," exclaimed the child, stretching her hand imploringly towards her, and sobbing in increasing distress.

"My dear child, my poor little girl, what grieves you so?" then Sister Mabel remembered that Bessie had been much with the three culprits, and connecting her distress with their expulsion, said, "are you crying so because three of your companions have been sent away in disgrace, or because you are grieved at the loss of their company?"

"Because I ought to be sent away too," broke from Bessie almost involuntarily. "Oh, Sister, let me come into your room, and I will tell you all."

As the door of the Sister's sitting-room closed behind her and the penitent child, Mary Anne wiped the tears from her own eyes, and covering her face, prayed for her little companion; then, as she stooped to pick up her work, she said to herself, "Now, please God, we shall begin to see daylight, what a mercy poor Bessie has taken this so to heart!"

It was a mercy indeed! and a turning point in Bessie's life. She looked pale the next morning, and her eyes were heavy with crying, but there was an expression of quiet happiness on her face that spoke of coming sunshine after rain.

She lingered in the schoolroom when the classes broke up, and drawing Mary Anne aside, put her arms round her and whispered, "Mary Anne, I'll always love you so. I'm so glad you said that last night. I'm going to begin really fresh now. I've told Sister Mabel everything—everything; I didn't hide one single thing. Oh, Mary Anne, I wish the others—there were some others, you know—would do so too."

"You help them to it," said Mary Anne, warmly returning her embrace. "You show them by your example how happy it is to be thoroughly true. Don't crow over them, whatever you do, but humble yourself to them, and help them by all the gentle, loving ways you can think of to turn over quite a new leaf, as you are determined, with God's help, now to do."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT "CASE."

MY readers may possibly remember the name of Mr. Grub, of Tod's Hole, farmer; and that it was a visit to him which first introduced Mark Staunton to the neighbourhood of "the Home of St. Mary and St. John, St. John's Common, Kirkminster."

Now Mrs. Grub was a person of great gentility, and admitted into a very select circle of acquaintance at Kirkminster; amongst these were Mr. and Mrs. Fox Adderly; Mr. Fox Adderly being an attorney practising in Kirkminster. Between the Grubs and the Adderlys there had sprung up a strong—what shall I call it?—not 'friendship,' friendship is something sacred; acquaintanceship, that expresses it better; or chumship—a sort of alliance offensive and defensive; "offensive" always, as many Kirkminsterers could testify, and "defensive" sometimes, as respectable people, against whom the alliance was formed, however forbearing they might be as a rule, were obliged now and then to attempt measures of retribution.

Mr. Grub had been this year elected churchwarden by the influence of Mr. Fox Adderly, and this had, of course, cemented the union between them. Mr. Grub's special claims to the office of churchwarden were that he was not a Churchman at all; that he had never entered a church door—so he boasted—till after his election, when he attended service two or three times in order to concert with Mr. Fox Adderly and the rest of his electors, how he could best thwart and spite the vicar, and annoy the regular congregation of Kirkminster church.

These claims were considered so irresistible that such small blemishes as drunkenness, dishonesty, and non-payment of debts, were held by some as mere amiable weaknesses; and by others as positively enhancing his other claims to office.

So Mr. Grub was churchwarden, and a nice time the vicar and church people of Kirkminster had of it; and Mrs. Grub became very intimate with Mrs. Fox Adderly.

Now one fine evening at the beginning of October, Mr. and Mrs. Grub, having accepted an invitation to tea, were regaled by Mr. and Mrs. Fox Adderly with much hospitality and splendour. That is to say, Mr. Adderly and Mr. Grub smoked and drank spirits in one parlour, whilst Mrs. Adderly and Mrs. Grub, together with two or three other ladies, drank tea and ate muffins in the other.

"I did not have a fire this evening," said Mrs. Adderly, "for

the room being small it soon gets too warm, and the evenings are still so fine; but bless me," she added, turning to the maid who had been bringing in the tea, "I wish you wouldn't stand there with the door in your hand, there's a draught fit to cut one's head off."

"I beg pardon, ma'am," said the girl, shutting the door, "but I thought you'd like to know that there's been the most extraordinary doings up there at St. Mary's all among the Nuns."

"La, Delia!" "My stars, girl!" "Do tell us, Delia!" burst simultaneously from the ladies.

Delia was a stout, fresh-coloured girl, with round, bird-like eyes. She was delighted with the sensation she had caused, and paused a moment before answering, thoroughly to enjoy it. "Well, mum, you may take your oath it's Gospel truth, for my own sister telled it me, which she had it from Mrs. Crump's young woman, who heard it up at the shop from Kezia Bowles, who was told by her young man as she keeps company with, and he had it from his own grandmother."

It was clearly impossible to doubt a story with so accurate a pedigree. "But what is it, Delia?" inquired the eager tea-party.

"Well, mum, you knows old Turner the cobbler down in Church Lane."

"I know him, he's in my district," replied one of the ladies, who was a self-constituted district visitor.

"Well, mum, his granddaughter, Jemima Watts, she was at school there, up along o' the Nuns."

"I know that," replied the district visitor, severely. "Often have I remonstrated with the unhappy old man. Go on, Delia, does your tale concern this unfortunate girl?"

"Yes, miss," replied Delia, "Jemima she turned Protestant and wanted for to read her Bible, so they took it from her, and first they beats her, and then they turns her out in the middle of the night on the common with nothing on but her shimmy."

The exclamations of horror which arose from her audience must have fully satisfied Delia. She stood slowly rubbing one hand over the other in an ecstasy of silent enjoyment. A conventional romance such as this was not to be had every day in Kirkminster.

"Stay, Delia," said her mistress, "this is so important I must call your master; this is a case for the interference of the law. I will call your master and Mr. Grub. How fortunate he is here. Mr. Grub as churchwarden must be made cognisant of these iniquities."

But neither Mr. Fox Adderly nor Mr. Grub were at first disposed to leave their pipes and grog. When, however, the whole tea-party streamed into the dining-parlour, relating Delia's tale in chorus,

they became sufficiently interested to call Delia in to be questioned more closely.

"I shouldn't wonder if I could make a case out of this," said Mr. Adderly.

Delia was soon pumped dry, she could tell no more than she had; but it appeared her sister was still in the kitchen. On any other occasion this would have excited great wrath in the breast of Mrs. Adderly; but now what was not due to the messenger of such a tale? "Call your sister, Delia, let us hear all she can tell us of this sad, sad history."

So Delia's sister was called, a tall, raw-boned girl with a flat nose, a wide mouth, and a cast in one eye. Her name was Imogen, or as her sister called her, 'Modgy.'

Modgy's version did not quite tally with Delia's. According to her, Jemima had been locked up for several months in the cellar, from which she had finally made her escape by letting herself out of the window by means of her sheets. How she mounted upwards by such a contrivance did not appear. She further improved on Delia's story by stating that Jemima Watts was a "mask of bruises, and so thin she wasn't nothin' but a bag of bones."

"This is a case which will require my careful investigation," said Mr. Adderly solemnly. "It is one in which our rights as Englishmen living under a constitutional government are called in question; Grub, we will see to this to-morrow. Miss Kettlewell, (this was to the 'district visitor') you say the grandfather of this poor, unhappy child is in your district, you will of course call and see the girl to-morrow. Find out everything you can from her about these old cats at St. Mary's." This was a very superfluous injunction to Miss Kettlewell, she was in a perfect fever at not being able to commence her investigation that moment.

The next morning all Kirkminster rang with the account of Jemima Watts' "wonderful escape" from St. Mary's.

The story varied perpetually according to the taste and fancy of the narrators. There were several newspapers in Kirkminster, each of which gave a different version of the thrilling event; but this was considerate on the part of the various editors, as by so doing they did not mar the sale of each other's papers.

"It is the most interesting and awful story I ever heard," said Miss Kettlewell to her friend Miss Skinner.

"Yes," said Miss Skinner, "it's as delightful as that charming book 'The Nun,' and 'Six Months in a Convent.'"

"Oh, quite as interesting," cried the four other Miss Skinners. "And then it's *true*," added the youngest Miss Skinner in a tone of triumph.

"True! but so are 'The Nun,' and 'Six Months in a Convent,'" exclaimed Miss Kettlewell and all the youngest Miss Skinner's sisters. "Surely, Horatia, you do not mean to throw any doubt upon them!"

Miss Horatia Skinner eagerly disclaimed any such intention, she only meant, she said, "that this was truer." When pressed to explain what she intended by this, she replied, all she meant was that this had actually happened at Kirkminster; and then she put on her bonnet to carry the information to such quarters as she thought it might, possibly, not yet have reached.

Before noon, Jemima had been confined in a garret, in a cellar, in a chest, in the coal hole, in a dungeon, constructed expressly for that very purpose,—for three weeks, three months, a year, several years—ever since she had been at St. Mary's; her offence was stated to be that she had concealed, and occasionally furtively read her Bible; that she had refused to worship the Virgin Mary; that she had eaten a piece of meat on Friday; that she had said one day in Lent that she wished she had an apple; that she had refused to go to Confession; that she had declared herself a Protestant: upon this last item every one was agreed. Before three o'clock that same afternoon she had been whipped till she could not stand—several times—once a week—every day; she had never had anything to eat but dry bread—mouldy bread—maggoty bread—pieces she had secreted off the floor—off the dunghill—she had been kept three days without any food at all. She had been turned out in the middle of the night with nothing on but her "shimmy"—some said her nightgown, but the "shimmy" carried it; without even her "shimmy"—stark naked; she had escaped by her sheets from the cellar window—out of the attic window—up a chimney—through a ventilator—disguised as a baker's boy—as an old woman. Towards evening the latter tale prevailed—as an old woman—as old Mrs. Pilcher; so well disguised, that though she met Mr. Neville as she was coming out he did not recognise her.

Meantime Jemima, totally unconscious of the interest she was exciting, had cried herself almost ill in her grandfather's little cottage—hovel it might almost be called—being a very small wooden tenement where the old man earned a bare subsistence by cobbling. He had been in sore trouble when Sister Katharine, the Superior of the "mission house" in Kirkminster had called, and told him his granddaughter could no longer be kept at St. Mary's; and on Jemima's first arrival he had loaded her with reproaches.

"I'm sure I don't know what's to become on you. If you can't get to service at once you must go to the House, for it's trouble enough I have to keep a roof over my head, and to get a morsel of food for to eat, without having you to find and keep, you good-for-

nothing hussy!" But after awhile the old man cooled down, and spoke in a gentler tone. "Ah, Jemmy, lass, you'll know one day what a fool you've been to throw away the best friends that ever you had in your life. What friends they've been to you! I'm sure if Sister Mabel had been your own mother she couldn't have done more for you than she did."

"Oh, grandfather," sobbed Jemima, "if I could but have seen Sister Mabel before I left, I'm sure she'd have begged me off. Oh, grandfather, don't you think if you were to go up to St. Mary's, and ask to see Sister Mabel, you could persuade her to beg for me that I might be taken back? Do try, dear grandfather. Oh, if I could only get back indeed I'd be a better girl. It was all that Isabella." And then her tears burst forth afresh.

The old man put down the shoe he was mending, and considered, "Well, Jemmy, I'll try," he said. "Fetch me my coat and hat, and I'll go and see what I can do with Sister Mabel. I don't think she'll say nay when she knows how sorry you are; for she's the sweetest lady as ever I see." And with that the old man, having arrayed himself in his Sunday best, set off on his errand.

Jemima watched him till he was out of sight, and then sat herself down to consider, but with a lighter heart, her future prospects. "Sister Mabel I know will take me back," she kept repeating to herself. "She'll never refuse grandfather, she is so kind; and the Reverend Mother and Mr. Neville will never refuse *her*; and oh, won't I work with a will when I get back, now Isabella's gone it'll be quite different." And then her spirits rose so much that she proceeded to tidy her dress, smooth her hair, wash her hands, and finally took up some work for her grandfather and stitched away quite cheerfully.

She had just succeeded in putting a very neat patch into an old waistcoat, and was about to get the dinner ready against the time her grandfather should return, when she heard the sound of several persons, talking loudly, coming down the lane, and presently Miss Kettlewell, accompanied by Mrs. Fox Adderly, Mrs. Grub, and the eldest Miss Skinner, stood at the door. That they were customers come to give an order for cobbling was Jemima's impression, and she curtsied to them accordingly.

"This cottage is in my district," said Miss Kettlewell, in a loud, commanding voice, as if asserting her right to it, and to all the mysteries and horrors which it might contain. "Pray, girl, is Master Turner at home?"

"No, ma'am," replied Jemima, curtsying again.

"Dear, how tiresome!" exclaimed the ladies collectively, "where *is he gone to, girl?*"

Now to this question *Jemima* did not at all wish to reply. She had no desire to make her expulsion from *St. Mary's* known in *Kirkminster*. So she hesitated, but on *Miss Kettlewell's* impatiently repeating the question, she faltered out, "*To St. Mary's.*"

"*To St. Mary's!*" repeated the ladies in varied tones of delight, "what about the business of that poor unhappy child, *Jemima Watts*?"

"My goodness!" thought poor *Jemima*, "they know all about it!" and at the idea that she was already known in the neighbourhood as a thief and a liar, she put her pinafore up to her eyes and cried dismally. The ladies looked at each other significantly, and then glanced round the cottage for seats. There were not many. But *Miss Kettlewell* took up her position on the cobbler's bench; *Mrs. Fox Adderly* in a rickety chair with arms; *Mrs. Grub* on one without; and *Miss Skinner* on the low stool from which *Jemima* had risen at their entrance.

"We have come to investigate this sad business," said *Mrs. Adderly* when they had settled themselves to their satisfaction; but the cottage being in *Miss Kettlewell's* 'district,' she looked upon this assertion of *Mrs. Adderly's* as unmannerly and presumptuous, and hastened to take the chief conduct of this interesting affair upon herself by saying, "This cottage being in my district I have lost no time in coming to make myself thoroughly conversant with all the details of this most melancholy case; and these ladies have kindly accompanied me to show their great interest in the matter." This was a hint to *Mesdames Adderly* and *Grub* that they were on no account to attempt to play first fiddle there. "In the first place," continued *Miss Kettlewell*, "we must see this wretched girl. Is she here or at the hospital, or," she suggested, as *Jemima* sobbed more violently than ever at this announcement, "is she already dead?"

"Ma'am!" ejaculated *Jemima*, the extremity of her astonishment drying up her tears.

"This girl, I say, how is she? where is she? don't stand staring there, child, answer."

"I'm here," murmured *Jemima*.

"You, yes, you; but surely," exclaimed *Miss Kettlewell* in a tone of mingled indignation and disappointment, "you're not *Jemima Watts*!"

"Yes, ma'am, please, ma'am," replied *Jemima*, curtsying again in terror, and never doubting but that this examination was a preliminary to her being carried before the magistrates, and sent to the treadmill, or transported for life. Her grandfather had told her in his anger when she first returned to him that it was a pity the Sisters had not had her "took up;" and it occurred to her

that the ladies of Kirkminster were of the same opinion, and about to bring it to pass.

"Well I never!" exclaimed all the ladies except Miss Kettlewell, who was speechless with indignation. And, indeed, considering all the trouble that lady had taken, Jemima's appearance was enough to make her indignant. This interesting victim of conventual cruelty stood before them a stout, chubby girl, dressed in a neat brown print frock, a lilac print pinafore, with, apparently, a full complement of petticoats, &c., and on her feet a good pair of boots.

"Who gave you your clothes, child?" asked Mrs. Grub, taking advantage of Miss Kettlewell's temporary prostration.

"The Mother Superior," whined Jemima, "she said I might have two frocks and a complete change, because grandfather was so poor." Jemima thought perhaps Mrs. Grub suspected she had stolen her garments.

"Disgusting!" ejaculated Miss Kettlewell, in a fresh accession of disappointment.

"But what were you turned out of St. Mary's for?" asked Miss Skinner eagerly. Miss Skinner being of a sanguine disposition, trusted something might yet be elicited to make up for Jemima's disappointing appearance.

Thus forced to criminate herself, poor Jemima confessed with many tears, and repeated protestations, that "it was all Isabella's fault," that she had been dismissed for taking things that didn't belong to her, and for telling stories; but she was "very sorry," she added earnestly, "very, very sorry; if they'd only take her back she'd never do so no more; grandfather was gone to beg Sister Mabel to take her back, and if Sister Mabel would be so merciful, she, Jemima, would be a good girl, indeed she would!"

"This beats everything I ever heard!" exclaimed Miss Kettlewell, rising in wrath. "Want to be taken back! Why, girl, you ought to go down on your knees and never leave off giving of thanks for having got safe out of that den of wickedness. I believe," continued Miss Kettlewell in an injured tone, turning to her companions, "that this girl has been bribed to talk this nonsense. It's preposterous to suppose that any one who had once got out of such a place could want to go back."

"Impossible!" cried the others; but they felt sadly desponding.

"Was it quite dark when you were turned out on the common?" asked Miss Skinner.

"I walked with Sister Ruth to the Mission House the day before yesterday after dinner. And I slept there that night, because the Mother Superior had said I was to have a full set of clothes, on account of grandfather being so poor, and they weren't quite ready;

and then Sister Katharine brought me here yesterday morning," was Jemima's answer.

Miss Kettlewell could stand it no longer, she walked out into the road; Mrs. Grub followed her. "When they beat you so dreadfully did they draw blood?" asked Miss Skinner, clinging fondly to a last hope.

"They never beat me at all, ma'am," replied Jemima in a tone of great surprise.

"More's the pity, I think," said Mrs. Adderly angrily, as she too left the house.

"But you were shut up?" pleaded Miss Skinner despairingly, as she prepared to follow.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh, she was shut up!" screamed Miss Skinner in exultation to her friends outside.

"Oh, she was shut up!" they repeated joyfully; and Mrs. Adderly remarking, "this might make a case for false imprisonment!" they turned back into the cottage.

But their hopes were again doomed to disappointment. It turned out that she had been shut up neither in garret nor cellar, but in "Miss Milly's bedroom," Miss Milly being a lady probationer, and away from St. Mary's at the time.

"And how long were you shut up?"

"Four days, ma'am."

"Four days! What did you do with yourself? was it solitary confinement? How shocking!"

"There was no one else in the room but me, ma'am; but dear Sister Ruth used to come in and out, and set me lessons to learn in the morning; and in the afternoon I used to do needlework." And then a tender remembrance of Sister Ruth recurred to her, and Jemima's tears fell fast.

"Solitary confinement, with compulsory hard labour," observed Mrs. Adderly, making notes.

"And you had nothing but bread and water all that time?" said Miss Skinner quickly, not so much in a tone of inquiry as of suggestion.

"No, ma'am, I had all my meals as usual," replied Jemima.

"Your meals as usual!" repeated Mrs. Adderly indignantly, "yes, but what meals where they? nothing fit for a Christian, I'll be bound."

"I had a round of bread and a mug of milk for breakfast," was the disappointing reply, "and the same for supper, and just whatever there happened to be for dinner."

"Dry bread for breakfast and supper," said Mrs. Adderly, con-

tinuing her notes, "and the leavings off the plates for dinner. Well, my dears," she remarked, when she and her colleagues had once more left the house, "if anything can be made of this, Mr. Fox Adderly is the man to do it, and you may rely on it he'll do his best. But I must say I wish there was more material."

"Oh, it's most disappointing!" cried the Misses Kettlewell and Skinner.

"Never mind, my dears," said Mrs. Adderly confidentially, "we'll make something of it yet."

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW THEY BEGAN IT.

OLD Master Turner returned from St. Mary's in low spirits.

Both Sister Mabel and the Superior, (for he had gone from one to the other) had informed him that no one once dismissed from St. Mary's could ever be received back again. Such was the rule of the house, and it was never departed from. At the same time the Superior would do what she could to help Jemima to earn a respectable living, and for that purpose gave the old man a note to Sister Katharine of the Mission House, requesting her to see what could be done for the child.

But when Master Turner heard of Jemima's visitors, and how they had elicited from her that she had been dismissed for dishonesty and deceit, he was very wroth. "How are you to get a situation of any kind if that's known of you all over the town?" said he to his unlucky granddaughter. Nevertheless before he tasted any dinner, he went off to the Mission House to deliver his note.

That afternoon he had visitors: Mr. Fox Adderly, Mr. Grub, and a fat smiling man with a soft coaxing voice, who introduced himself as Mr. Bliss. Old Turner bowed rather gruffly and grunted a sort of acknowledgment of their "Good day to you, Master Turner," without pausing in his work. He did not like his visitors and was indifferent as to whether they perceived it or not.

"Jemmy, you'd best go up stairs," said he; and Jemmy accordingly retired to the top of the ladder, which led to her grandfather's sleeping-room, from whence she could hear every word that was said.

"*We have called to speak to you about this unfortunate affair of*

your granddaughter, Mr. Turner," said Mr. Fox Adderly; "and to assure you of our profound sympathy."

"Much obliged," replied Mr. Turner, drily.

"When I tell you that I am the secretary of the 'Amalgamated Protestants,'" observed Mr. Bliss smiling very sweetly on the old cobbler, "you will not doubt my sincere interest in the fate of your charming granddaughter. You have heard of the 'Amalgamated Protestants,' Mr. Turner?"

"Can't say as I have, sir. I know there are a many clubs in the town; and there's the 'Freemasons,' I know, and the 'Foresters,' and the 'Odd Fellows;' and I belonged to a club once myself, till it broke, worse luck; but we was called the 'Limited Cobblers.'"

Mr. Bliss waved his hand with a deprecating smile. "Mere vanity, my dear sir; the objects of those societies are mere worldliness. Now those of the 'Amalgamated Protestants' are of the highest order. The object for which we are specially leagued together is the diffusion and maintenance of pure unadulterated Protestantism."

"Don't know nothing on it, sir," said the imperturbable Mr. Turner.

"Mr. Fox Adderly is our solicitor."

The cobbler grunted.

"Mr. Grub is one of our best friends. We have many warm supporters in Kirkminster; and I have no doubt, if you will be guided by us, that we shall soon see your interesting granddaughter righted; and the base arts of her Jesuitical persecutors thoroughly exposed."

"May be, sir," replied the cobbler, "but your talk's altogether beyond me, I don't take your meaning at all."

"We mean this, Mr. Turner," interposed Mr. Fox Adderly eagerly, "that if this child, Jemima Watts, will follow our leading we have no doubt that we shall be able to make out a good case of false imprisonment against these old cats at St. Mary's."

"Oh, you do, do yer?" said the old man, pausing in his work to cast a look of disgust on the enthusiastic Mr. Adderly; "and how do you mean to do that 'ere, sir?"

"This poor child declares that she was shut up, condemned to solitary confinement with compulsory hard labour for four days: her food during that melancholy period consisting of dry bread, and the refuse left from the meals of the establishment."

"Then she told a very big lie," said the old man stoutly.

All this Jemima heard, and was more frightened than ever. She longed to call out, "Grandfather, I never said nothing of the kind," but the words died on her lips from sheer terror.

"Well, well," said Mr. Bliss waving his hand again, and smiling

more sweetly than before, "we will not split straws, Mr. Turner; the long and short of it is, we see this will give us a handle against the people at St. Mary's, and we do not mean to let such a good opportunity escape us: if you assist us you will find it well worth your while, besides proving yourself worthy to be an Amalgamated Protestant. I think I have spoken plainly," added he with a beaming look on his companions, who nodded approvingly.

"I don't think you've spoken plainly," said the cobbler angrily, "what is it as you wants my girl to do? Why don't you say what you mean? D'yer want her to bear false witness, and swear to lies?"

"That is strong language, Mr. Turner," said Mr. Fox Adderly. "But let it pass. We simply want your girl to answer any questions we may put to her, *as we put them.*" He laid a strong emphasis on these last words.

"And what then?" asked the cobbler.

"Then as I said before we shall have no difficulty in establishing a case of false imprisonment."

"Blest if I knows how you're going to do that," said the old man contemptuously.

"Wasn't she locked up for four days? answer me that."

"The door wasn't locked as ever I heard of."

"Well she was put in a room by herself."

"I say, Muster Adderly," said the cobbler, laying down his work, "you be a family man, I think."

"Yes—well?"

"And you, Muster Grub?"

"Yes."

"And you, sir, the Amalekite Protestant?"

"I am," said Mr. Bliss complacently.

"And do you mean, gen'lemen, to tell me that you never put a child of yours into a room by itself for lying and stealing? that's to say if the lying and stealing was in any ways inconvenient to yourselves."

"That's quite a different thing," said Mr. Fox Adderly, determined to be patient with the old man. "Parents have a right to punish their children."

"And not schoolmasters nor schoolmissuses? Let me tell you, gen'lemen, that if any one had a right to punish my Jemmy it was them ladies up at St. Mary's. Why when her poor mother died here in this very house, and left this poor little creatur with me, and I nearly sewn up with the rheumatiz, what does that blessed Sister Katharine do but she gets my girl taken into that there home; and if ever any one ever did their duty by a motherless child it was *them dear ladies.* And neither me nor my Jemmy is a-going to

tell any lies for to please you, nor any masticated Protestants whatsoever;" and with that the old man returned vigorously to his work, and all this Jemima heard sitting at the top of the stairs.

Mr. Bliss checked Mr. Fox Adderly who was about to answer, and said pleasantly, "What do you purpose doing with your granddaughter, Mr. Turner?"

"Sister Katharine she's a-going for to help her to get a little place."

"I thought as much. And does Sister Katharine really believe she will succeed in finding a place for a girl who has been expelled from one of her own schools for lying and stealing?"

"Sure that needn't be blabbed against the poor thing everywhere. She is but young, and it's but fair she should have another good chance."

"No doubt; but I think she will have a better chance if you let her follow our counsels. I tell you plainly, my good man," here Mr. Bliss spoke slowly and emphatically, smiling sweetly all the time, "that Jemima Watts will find it impossible to keep any place of Sister Katharine's finding. Wherever she goes her mistress will always know how she came to leave St. Mary's."

The half-mended shoe dropped from the old man's hand. "Do you mean to tell me that you'd be so cruel as to hurt a poor motherless girl like that!"

"We don't want to hurt her, indeed; we wish to benefit her. We will ensure her a good place, and you yourself will not be out of pocket. Consider it well, my good man. It is a piece of good luck to you which may not fall again in your way. You will be doing no one an injury by assisting us in our investigations into the proceedings at St. Mary's. You will simply be aiding in the diffusion of undiluted Protestantism. And you owe nothing to these people. Why not have your little innocent revenge? Have they not turned your girl out, sent her back on your hands, though you are less able now than when they first took her, to earn a living for more than yourself? Why should they not take the consequences?"

It is impossible to convey any idea of the charming manner in which Mr. Bliss made these little suggestions. "There, my dear friend," he continued, rising, "we will not hinder your work any longer. You shall have time to consider how you can best aid the Protestant cause in Kirkminster. Mr. Fox Adderly shall call upon you again, and learn the results of your deliberation. Meantime, please take this as compensation for our having hindered you in your work."

Old Turner had it in his mind to swear at him, but the touch of the silver slipped into his hand changed the half-formed oath into

a gruff, "Thank ye, sir, it'll be handy," and then his visitors departed. He did not resume his work, however, but sat staring uneasily at the half-crown, and sorely perplexed and disturbed in his mind, till *Jemima* crept into the room. At her approach he hastily pocketed the money, and was unusually surly all the rest of the day.

Nor did a second visit from Mr. Fox Adderly alone on the morrow improve matters. He stayed some time with the old man, *Jemima* sitting as before on the top stair, wondering much what it was these gentlemen wanted her to do. Naturally a dull heavy child she did not perceive, as *Isabella* would have perceived, the road to fame that was opening out before her. Her conscience told her she had been a very wicked girl, and she was unfeignedly sorry, and conscience making her a coward she made up her mind that Mr. Adderly's visits must be intended as preliminaries to her being given up to justice. Her grandfather's testiness increased her fears. On the third day he bade her make herself tidy and go up to Mrs. Fox Adderly's, and *Jemima* obeyed trembling. Judge therefore her surprise when she found herself received by Mrs. Adderly almost with open arms, and treated to currant wine and plum cake. After her mind had been opened and her lips loosened by this generous fare, she was again introduced to Mrs. Grub, who together with Mrs. Adderly put her through another cross-examination; and this time possibly from the effect of the little feast, and a desire of showing her gratitude by pleasing her entertainers, she made such answers to their interrogations as afforded them lively hopes that she would prove a valuable instrument after all, besides giving them such a general insight into the daily routine of the Home as enabled them to cook their charges in a most satisfactory manner.

"It was awkward," as Mrs. Fox Adderly had observed to Mrs. Grub, "to set to work quite in the dark."

Jemima went home with a bright sixpence in her pocket and an invitation to come the next day and dine with *Delia*. Her grandfather listened in silence to her rapturous accounts of Mrs. Adderly's kindness, and looked thoughtfully at the sixpence. It wouldn't do to throw away friends, thought he, especially friends that dealt in half-crowns and sixpences; and apparently Mrs. Adderly had more power to forward or mar *Jemima's* worldly prospects than Sister *Katharine*.

Jemima went the next day to dine with *Delia*, and after that, had pretty much the run of the house, being employed as a sort of supernumerary, washing up the cook's dishes for her, and helping *Delia* about the house. In a very few days it was surprising what a change came over her feelings with respect to St. Mary's. She

began to think she had been very badly used; and before the week was over she had forgotten all about those awkward appropriations of her companions' property, and was as fully convinced as Mrs. Adderly could have desired, that she was an injured child, and that she never had had anything to be grateful for to the Sisters; for, so her new friends suggested, had they not made a living out of her work? and she began to believe Mrs. Grub's assertions, that the orphanage was a mere trap into which friendless or unwary girls were decoyed that the Sisters might be kept in idleness by the proceeds of their work. So the case went swimmingly on, everything promising most favourably.

In the course of the daily pumpings—pumpings out and pumpings in—to which *Jemima* was now subjected, it was elicited that two other girls had been associated with her in her misfortunes and persecutions. Of their whereabouts *Jemima* knew nothing. She was however, aware that *Hetty* had a married sister living at *Althorne*, a village six miles distant from *Kirkminster*. Of *Isabella* she could give no account whatever; and the “*Amalgamated Protestants*,” knowing nothing of that young person's qualifications, nor guessing what an invaluable ally she would have proved to them, contented themselves with hunting up *Hetty*. It must be confessed that the case had a severe loss in the absence of *Isabella*.

Hetty's sister, *Mrs. Brody*, threw herself heartily into their schemes. She had been exceedingly indignant when *Sister Ruth* had brought *Hetty* back to her, and having first soundly rated the Sister and then beaten *Hetty*, had ever since filled the ears of all who would listen, with her complaints against the Sisters for returning the little culprit on her hands. Her husband was even more indignant than herself, and listened to *Messrs. Adderly* and *Bliss* with much complacency.

“Of course you understand, *Mr. Brody*,” said the latter, “that you will suffer no loss in this matter; and that full compensation will be given to you and your sister-in-law for any waste of time, and so forth.”

As *Tom Brody* grinned very much, touched his forehead, and said, “I'm sure I'm greatly obliged to you, sir,” it is to be supposed that he did understand; and he undertook to make *Hetty* understand also.

Mrs. Brody, anxious to get *Hetty* off her hands as soon as possible, had found a place for the little girl, with *Mrs. Crab* the baker. There she did what she was told, or tried to do it, looked after the children, and nursed the baby. The doing what she was told was a difficult matter, for *Mrs. Crab's* orders were often contradictory, and though enforced by a very sharp switch not always reconcilable

or feasible, involving as they too often did matters quite beyond her strength. The children, too, were no small aggravation of her trouble, as all their shortcomings and misdoings were visited upon her; a fact they were not slow to perceive and avail themselves of. Had it not been for the baby, Hetty more than once thought she must have run away.

But the latter, though very heavy and very fat, soon found out by its baby instincts that Hetty was a kind and tender nurse, and clung to her and cried after her in a manner that was balm to the little girl's sad heart. The delight of feeling that one being loved her, supported her through many a weary day; and however tired she might be, she was always ready to lug the baby away to some retired spot, to cuddle and kiss it while it was awake, and sing St. Mary hymns and songs to it while it slept.

It was a hard life the little girl now lived. She had been sent from St. Mary's with a good suit and change of clothes; but these Mrs. Brody had appropriated to her own eldest daughter, a child about Hetty's size, though two or three years younger, and had fitted out her little sister in any old garments that could be made to hang together.

Scantly clothed, wretchedly fed, overworked, scolded and beaten, Hetty cried herself to sleep night after night thinking of the home she had lost; and during the few quiet times she passed with the baby, the remembrance of her own unthankful, ungrateful conduct while there rose up before her, and cut her to the quick.

That she could never return she knew. Sister Ruth had told her that, and she drooped under the apparent hopelessness of her present position. Now and then she ventured to complain to her sister, complained of hunger, and showed her bruises; but she was only met by the taunt, "If you don't like it, go into the House; we're not going to be bothered with you, I can tell you."

"And this is my sister," said the motherless child to herself, as she turned away crying bitterly. And then the remembrance of the bright faces, cheerful loving voices, and motherly care which had been hers, at St. Mary's, smote her again to the heart. "Oh, Sister Mabel, Sister Mabel," she sobbed, "oh, dear Sister Ruth! if I could but see your faces once more. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do!" The thought that she could have lightly esteemed such a home when there, amazed her now; that she could ever have thought anything a hardship, or joined in any of Isabella's nasty ungrateful speeches seemed wholly incredible.

She was meditating upon this one day with the baby in her arms when she heard her mistress' shrill voice calling to her. It was a sound that always made her start and tremble, and she ran now to

answer the summons as quickly as the weight of the baby would allow.

With Mrs. Crab, who was in a great state of pleasurable excitement, she found her brother-in-law Tom Brody; and soon learnt from him that a summons was about to be issued against the Superior of St. Mary's for the false imprisonment of herself and Jemima Watts, and that she would be required as witness; "and you're to make it out as bad a case as you can, d'ye hear? and say everything the gentlefolks wants you to, or it'll be the worse for you I can tell you."

"But what do they want me to say, Tom Brody?" asked the bewildered child.

"Everything that you can think of against them Sisters. You serve them out for turning you out of their house. You're to make out that neither you nor Watts did nothing, but was shut up and kept short o' wittles, and then turned out for no cause whatsoever."

"But it wouldn't be true," said Hetty.

"True!" Tom Brody swore a frightful oath; "you're a nice article to talk about truth, you are; you're just to say what you're bid, d'ye hear? What's it signify to you whether it's true or not?"

"Ah, what indeed?" said Mrs. Crab. "I never was so pleased in all my life as to think they horrid Sisters are going to be served out at last."

And indeed Mrs. Crab was so pleased that she became for a while almost amiable, and talked incessantly the whole evening of the impending exposure and consequent destruction of St. Mary's. As to Hetty she was like one in a dream. The only idea present to her was, that some harm was intended to the friends of her helpless orphaned childhood, and that she was to assist in it.

"Tom Brody may kill me if he likes," said she to herself, "but I'll keep my promise to Sister Ruth, and never tell a lie again, but pray to God every day to make me true. And the idea that I'd tell a lie to hurt them! Jemima may say what she likes, and Tom Brody may do what he likes, but I'll be true."

And then she repeated a little prayer for truth which she had promised Sister Ruth to say daily, and which the Sister had taught her the day before she left St. Mary's, taught her as she held her on her lap, whispering words of hope and love, and reminding her that "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." "Mind that," she had said, "Hetty, 'Beholding the good;' there's not one single thing you do to please Him, and prove to Him you're really sorry, that He'll overlook. Though we

may never know it, He'll know it, and you'll win His blessing yet, my child."

Oh, how well Hetty remembered these words ; and lightly heard and soon forgotten lessons of holiness came back to her now ; and she who had never prayed at St. Mary's, prayed now with all her heart the prayers she had learnt there.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW THEY WENT ON WITH IT.

THE consternation which prevailed at the House of St. Mary and St. John, when it was known that the Superior had been summoned to answer a charge of false imprisonment brought against her by *Jemima Watts*, may be better imagined than described.

The Superior herself was the only person who maintained any composure. She was at first greatly surprised, and inclined to think it a practical joke ; but when assured by *Mr. Fleming*, the solicitor to the Home, that the proceedings were all regular, and conducted by no less a power than the association of Amalgamated Protestants generalised by their President, one *Mr. Saul Musket*, and advised by their attorney, *Mr. Fox Adderly*, after uttering two or three times with different emphasis the homely ejaculation, "Well I never!" she apparently dismissed the subject from her thoughts, and went about her daily avocations as quietly as if there were no such things as "Amalgamated Protestants" in the world.

Sister *Mabel* was almost angry with her. "How can you take it so quietly, my Mother?" she exclaimed.

"My dear child," replied the Superior, "why should I not be quiet? I cannot alter *Mr. Musket's* or *Mr. Fox Adderly's* designs."

"Oh, my Mother, what a dreadfully wicked child this *Jemima* must be! we have indeed cherished a viper."

"I do not think so," replied the Mother. "I believe the child is more foolish than wicked, that she has fallen into bad hands, and that these people are making a tool of her."

Sister *Ruth* was even more disturbed than Sister *Mabel*. She had had charge of the young culprits up to the day of their leaving St. Mary's, and had devoutly believed in the sincerity of *Jemima's* as well as *Hetty's* penitence. Now she echoed Sister *Mabel's* exclamation, "we have cherished a viper indeed!"

Another thing troubled Sister *Ruth*. *Mr. Fleming*, the Sisters'

Solicitor, had informed her that she must go to Kirkminster as a witness. She had never been there since the day she left it nearly broken-hearted, a childless widow, to seek once more the shelter of her dear old home, and she shrank from the idea of being stared at, and gossiped about, in the Town Hall. Besides she knew more of Kirkminster mobs and Amalgamated Protestants, than did the Superior; and her heart almost died out of her at the prospect of being confronted with them. But after one very earnest entreaty to be spared this ordeal, which Mr. Fleming positively refused, she spoke not a word of her fears and anxieties to any one, and no one knew, not even Sister Mabel, of her sleepless tearful nights, and her days of headache and anxiety.

The first day of November, the festival of All Saints, was that appointed for the opening of the great case; and Mr. Fleming drove up in his pony-chaise in the morning to direct and encourage his victims, as he called them. Sister Ruth thought him an unfeeling monster; for having no idea of her terrors and griefs, and encouraged by the quiet sang froid of the Superior, Mr. Fleming saw nothing but the comical side of the matter, and every now and then went off into roars of laughter.

"I should like to gag the man," said she in a tone of annoyance to Sister Mabel. "What in the world can he see to laugh at?" And then as a counterpoise she began to cry, for which Sister Mabel reproved her.

"We must not cry indeed, my dear; and we must be as cool as cucumbers."

"I hope Mr. Fleming is not going with us."

"O no, there he goes in his pony-chaise; and here comes the old fly for us. Now, my dear, keep your tears till they're wanted, and jump in."

The victims consisted, by Mr. Fleming's orders, of the Superior, Sister Mabel, Sister Ruth, and Carrie.

Messrs. Musket and Adderly had wished to fix the fifth of November for their great field day against St. Mary's, but the magistrates fearing a riot had refused.

"What sort of people are the magistrates?" asked the Superior of Mr. Neville, whilst the fly was performing all manner of strange evolutions in its endeavours to get up to the entrance.

"Two of them, Blaber and Burke, are 'Amalgamated Protestants'; Styleman is a jolly old-fashioned squire, with a great horror of everything which appears to him out of the way; of Elsworth I know nothing, except that he is not friendly to the vicar, and that his boys took very prominent parts in the proceedings on Guy Fawkes day last year. In a word I believe these four men are

against us; but I should imagine from what I have heard that both Styleman and Elsworthy are gentlemen, and would see fair play."

"Humph!" said the Superior, and then she stepped quietly into the fly; and Mr. Neville was driven to Kirkminster in Mr. Fleming's pony-chaise which that gentleman sent back for him.

Althorne was six miles the other side of Kirkminster, and Tom Brody having taken a holiday, proposed to walk over with Hetty. His wife dressed the little girl in clothes belonging to her own eldest daughter, but for obvious reasons not in those given her at St. Mary's.

"If any one asks you where you got your clothes," said she, "you say I gave you every stitch of them, and that I took them from my own child for you."

There were so many things for Hetty to do before she started, and Mrs. Crab was so difficult to satisfy, that she was likely to have come away without any breakfast. But rendered bold by hunger, just as she was starting, she asked for some, and her mistress threw her a crust which she ate as she tramped through the mud after her brother-in-law.

Mr. Fox Adderly feeling that much depended on Hetty's evidence had been so kind as to come over twice to instruct her as to what she was to say, and how she was to demean herself. Hetty was so silent and shy, however, that he could make but little of her, nevertheless he comforted himself with the reflection that she could be made to say quite enough to corroborate Jemima's evidence, and that was all that was required.

Meantime Hetty, though she said nothing, had kept her ears open to everything that was said around her touching the matter of this great case, and now as she munched her dry bread, and toiled on after Tom Brody, she revolved all she had heard in her mind.

"Tom Brody," she said presently, after the last mouthful of bread had been disposed of, "am I to say all that gentleman wants me to say, before the magistrates?"

"To be sure you are."

"Don't people when they're before the magistrates swear they'll only speak the truth?"

"They kiss the book, but they'd be precious big fools if they said anything but what they chose."

"What do you mean by kissing the book? what book do they kiss?"

"A Bible, I suppose, or a Testament; I don't know what it is, but one of they; that's what they call 'being sworn.'"

"Then when they kiss this Bible or Testament that's as if they swore they'd say nothing but what was quite true?"

Tom was busy lighting his pipe, so Hetty had to wait for an answer; when this was accomplished he said surlily, "What are you asking all these here questions about being sworn for? You've nothing to do with that; mind your own business."

"Shan't I be sworn, then?" asked Hetty quickly.

Tom swore at her. "Whether you're sworn or not you've nothing to do but to say everything that gentleman told you to; if you don't I swear I'll knock your head off. There now."

After this Hetty did not speak another word, but kept incessantly repeating Sister Ruth's prayer for truth to herself, till they reached Kirkminster. Then as they approached the Town Hall the crowd was so thick that she was obliged to hold on by Tom Brody's coat for fear of being lost.

A fly was just driving away from the door, and Hetty heard some persons say that the Sisters had just gone in; and on all sides the sounds of abuse and railing against them met her ears. Presently there was a yell of hate and scorn; and Hetty saw Mr. Neville step out of Mr. Fleming's pony-chaise amid a storm of curses, hisses, and groans. Before he was quite out of the pony-chaise a rush was made, and had not the police surrounded him, he would certainly have sustained some bodily injury. As it was Hetty saw a woman spit at him, and her young blood being roused, and all the best feelings of her nature awakened, she doubled her little fist and hit the aggressor a good sharp blow on the back. The woman turned, but Hetty had already slipped under the elbows of the crowd who surrounded the door, and, still holding by her brother-in-law's coat, passed with him inside the court house.

There the Sisters had finally arrived in safety. They all looked very pale, however, for the horrible language through which they had had to run the gauntlet was enough to have unnerved even a pretty strong man; Sister Ruth looked absolutely bloodless, and her eyes quite wild with fear. But Hetty did not see her former protectors, the crowd was too thick for her to have seen, even had she been taller, anything but the backs of the persons through whom Tom Brody dragged and pushed her, till she found herself, she knew not how, sitting on a bench beside Jemima. A hurried recognition was all that passed between the children as they were both too scared by the unusual scene around them to say much; and then they crept close together for protection.

The court was densely crowded; all Kirkminster, apparently, had come to have a good stare at the notorious Superior of the Order of St. Mary and St. John; and as soon as it was known which was she, eye-glasses and opera-glasses were levelled at her, and the gossips of Kirkminster stood on tiptoe to gaze. Truly

there was not much to see; only a small, slight, elderly woman, always rather pale, and now a shade paler than usual, but as quiet and self-possessed as if she were accustomed to be summoned once a month, at least, for false imprisonments. She put on her spectacles and calmly surveyed the scene before her, noting attentively the appearance of each magistrate as he entered.

Mr. Blaber and Mr. Burke, the two magisterial "Amalgamated Protestants," arrived first, and in company. The former was a tall thin man with eager restless eyes, and lips so compressed that they appeared to have been squeezed altogether out of his physiognomy. The latter, broad-shouldered, beetle-browed, with a coarse mouth, thick nose, and a loud boisterous manner. Both these magnates talked and laughed much and noisily, and seemed in a high state of enjoyment.

After them came Sir Lionel Styleman, an old gentleman with a very red face, and very white hair; deeply convinced that the constitution was in imminent danger, from which it was his special mission to deliver it; and too much impressed by the solemnity of the occasion to do more than bow silently and somewhat haughtily to his colleagues, and then scowl portentously on the malefactors from St. Mary's.

Mr. Elsworthy entered last with the air of a man who felt himself late and hurried. He was homely in appearance, but had a pleasant sensible face, and the manners of a gentleman. With him were two remarkably handsome lads, about nineteen and sixteen; his eldest sons, the heroes, so the Superior presumed, of the Guy Fawkes demonstrations. These young fellows had insisted on accompanying their father on account of the interest they felt in the impending destruction of St. Mary's, and their anxiety to make the coming Guy as good a representation of Mr. Neville as possible.

The whole Elsworthy family felt great interest in that day's proceedings. Jemima's tale had been carried to Highfield Manor in its most tragical and thrilling form; and the indignation it had excited there had been very deep. Arthur and Frank Elsworthy regretted it was not possible to storm St. Mary's at the head of a band of "brisk Kirkminster lads," disperse those "frightful old harpies"—the Sisters—and release their innocent victims. Mrs. Elsworthy sighed at the thought that these victims were poor helpless orphans; Marion and Ernestine, the elder girls, could talk and think of nothing else but the poor little girl who had been so persecuted for her religion; and the governess, who dabbled in literature, immediately commenced a serial tale "to be completed in twelve chapters, entitled 'The Young Protestant, founded on fact.'"

So Mr. Elsworthy and his sons had come down brim-full of

righteous indignation, which their walk had in no way cooled. They had arranged with Mrs. Elsworthy that they would walk to the town, and she was to send the carriage to fetch them away—"But don't come yourself, Matilda," said her husband, "let the carriage bring you home first, and then come on for us; for there are sure to be a number of rough people about. The worst of these 'Amalgamated Protestants' is, that they always stir up the dregs of the town."

And indeed the "dregs of the town" had been most assiduously stirred up on the present occasion. Besides holding a very stormy meeting, Mr. Saul Musket, the "President of the A. P.s" had caused numbers of inflammatory handbills to be posted, circulars to be distributed, and little tracts of fiery eloquence to be sown broadcast up and down the town. So that no wonder the streets were thronged, the Town Hall crowded, and the language and demeanour of the mob such as few respectable persons would have cared to encounter, except such as considered all this as satisfactory evidence of the "deep-rooted religious antagonism of the masses to the soul-destroying doctrines of Catholicism, and the innate love implanted in every English breast, however humble, of the glorious liberty and ennobling principles of Protestantism."

These "ennobling principles," and this "glorious liberty," took (at Kirkminster, at least,) the invariable form of very foul language and sometimes not a few broken heads; but these ebullitions considered merely as the overflowings of religious enthusiasm were of course highly satisfactory.

This day, as a pleasing variety, they had shaped themselves into the great case, which Mr. Fox Adderly now proceeded to open with an eloquence and force which they only could have inspired; and to support which Jemima Watts was called as the first witness.

She was dreadfully frightened; for the sight of the Sisters awoke a feeling akin to remorse within her, and a vague apprehension that she had come there for the express purpose of telling lies. She was used to Mr. Fox Adderly, however, and he spoke to her so kindly and pleasantly that she felt somewhat reassured, and, some unintelligible words having been said to her, she kissed a book presented to her without the smallest idea as to what book it might be, or of the nature of the obligations she had incurred by that ceremony.

Mr. Fox Adderly was certainly a clever man. He made Jemima tell her tale just as he had all along intended she should tell it; and as she answered question after question according to his will, the child really believed she was stating facts. When she had ended every one felt very indignant. Old Sir Lionel Styleman wiped his forehead, shook his head, and was quite overcome by what he had just heard; and the expression of Mr. Elsworthy's face as he looked

at the Sisters, expressed both anger and dislike. As to Messrs. Blaber and Burke their countenances beamed with unmingled satisfaction.

So far, nothing could be more satisfactory, but it was unfortunate that in cross-examination Mr. Fleming made Jemima unsay every word she had spoken, and contradict herself in every particular. This, however, the crowded audience considered a matter of course, and as in no way militating against the veracity of the witness.

As she was going down, on the conclusion of her examination, Mr. Elsworthy said suddenly, "How did you come to be in that place at all, girl? who placed you there? who paid for you?"

"Nobody paid for me, sir," replied Jemima, curtsying, "Sister Katharine took me there when mother died, because grandfather was too poor to keep me."

"And nobody paid for you?"

"No, sir."

"Did the Sisters clothe, and feed, and educate you for nothing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph," said Mr. Elsworthy, and the expression of his face changed.

Mr. Fox Adderly, not liking this, elicited from Jemima that the Sisters lived by the orphans' labour.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Elsworthy rather sharply.

"They took in needlework from ladies, sir," said Jemima, "and then we did it and the ladies paid them."

"And then out of that money they paid for your maintenance?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that by this arrangement they enabled you to do something towards earning the food you ate, instead of your being mere idle recipients of charity—mere paupers in fact."

Jemima stared, but made no answer, and Mr. Fox Adderly got rid of her as soon as possible, for he did not at all like Mr. Elsworthy's manner of examining. He called his next witness, Hester Dale, to confirm Jemima's testimony, such as it had been before Mr. Fleming and Mr. Elsworthy had so unwarrantably interfered with it.

Hester Dale was twelve years old, but remarkably small for her years, and so very tiny and childlike did she look, that Mr. Elsworthy said he doubted whether she understood the nature of an oath. In answer to his question, however, the little girl said she did. "Well, explain it to me," said Mr. Elsworthy very kindly, for he had little girls of his own.

Hetty looked up in his face, and her cheeks, which before had been very white, now flushed painfully, and her eyes sparkled.

"It means," she said, "that I promise before the Great God, Who sees and knows everything, that I will only tell the truth."

"Very good," said Mr. Elsworthy, "let her be sworn. And Hetty, taking the book, pressed it reverently to her lips, and then turned to confront Mr. Fox Adderly. If he had had the smallest suspicion of the trouble this small, feeble-looking witness would have occasioned him, he would never have summoned her from Althorne. He could make nothing of her. She would corroborate nothing that Jemima had said, except her answers to Mr. Fleming. Then Mr. Fox Adderly saw there was nothing for it but to bully, but Mr. Elsworthy again interfered, and Hetty told her whole story, —the truth—the whole truth—and nothing but the truth, no cross-examination shaking her testimony.

In answer to Mr. Elsworthy's questions, she said she also had been kept for nothing at St. Mary's, and many others as well; that they did needlework every afternoon, and that was how they learned to work: that she had always been well clothed, well fed, well taught, and could read, write, and cypher; that they learned a great deal out of the Bible, that none of them were allowed to begin work in the morning till they had learned at least one verse, and that she, Hetty, knew by heart most of the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, and some other chapters which she enumerated. Then she confessed, still in answer to Mr. Elsworthy, how she came to be dismissed the Home, all the details of her imprisonment, which certainly did not sound very shocking, and mentioned the fact of the Superior's gift of clothes.

"Are those the clothes you have on?" asked Mr. Elsworthy.

"No, sir, my sister took them away because they were new, to give to her little girl. These are not mine at all, they belong to her little girl. I'm only wearing them for to-day."

All this was so unsatisfactory that Sir Lionel Styleman suggested to Mr. Elsworthy that he did not think his method of examination was regular, and both Mr. Blaber and Mr. Burke attempted to check it. But Mr. Elsworthy answered with some asperity that their object there was to endeavour to discover the truth, and that he considered his mode of examination was more likely to attain that end than Mr. Fox Adderly's; a speech which that gentleman resented, and some hot words were spoken on either side. Finally Mr. Elsworthy was allowed to continue his examination of Hetty, and she proceeded to state that she had always been very happy at St. Mary's; that of all things she should like to return, but that she knew that was impossible.

"How do you know that?" asked the magistrate.

"Sister Ruth told me so, sir."

"Sister Ruth, that is the Sister who looked after you when you were shut up?"

"Yes, sir." Then in answer to Mr. Fox Adderly she said that she had not seen any of the Sisters, or had any communication with any one belonging to St. Mary's since she left; that they had had no idea what evidence she intended giving that day; that she was not now telling lies in hopes they would take her back.

"Yet you confess you told lies at the 'Home,'" said Mr. Fox Adderly.

"Yes, sir," replied Hetty sadly, and her head drooped.

"So did that other girl," observed Mr. Elsworthy, "she was dismissed for lying and stealing, you will remember, Mr. Adderly. She herself admitted it, and this witness confirms it. But tell me, my girl," said he to Hetty, in the same kind voice in which he had all along addressed her, "how is it that you were so careless of truth there, and yet seem to understand so well the duty of truth-telling?"

"Because I promised, I promised," answered Hetty, bursting into tears.

"Promised what? promised whom?"

"The day before I left," replied the little girl, checking her sobs, and endeavouring to steady her voice, "I was sitting in Sister's lap, with my head on her shoulder, and she had told me I couldn't stay at St. Mary's, or be taken back there; but she said the Great God would know if I tried to please Him, and He'd bless me if I did: and then she made me promise I'd say a prayer to be true every morning and every night, and that I'd try, with GOD's help, never to tell a lie again. And she taught me a prayer to say, and I have said it every morning and every night since."

"Repeat it now," said Mr. Elsworthy. But the other magistrates interposed, it would be wasting time, they said, and was wholly irrelevant. "I differ from you," said Mr. Elsworthy; "I heard a great deal before these proceedings commenced of the necessity of finding out something of the system of teaching pursued at St. Mary's; we have found out a good deal already, I think; and nothing tending to throw light on the subject can be irrelevant." Mr. Elsworthy's manner was so decided, and he was a man of such note in the neighbourhood, that he carried his point; and on his second bidding Hetty, amid a silence so profound that every word was distinctly heard, reverently folding her hands, repeated in a clear, childlike voice the following prayer:

"Oh make me true in thought, in word, in deed,
Thou God of Truth, Who for my sins didst bleed:
Pluck up, root out, destroy whate'er in me
I dare not, Holy LORD, Thine Eye should see:
O make me true, Thou, Who art Truth and Light;
To keep Thy truth, grant me Thy help, Thy might."

For a full minute or more after Hetty's voice had ceased not a word was said; Sir Lionel Styleman stared, Messrs. Blaber and Burke scowled, Mr. Fox Adderly internally anathematised the witness, and presently Mr. Elsworthy told her she might stand down. Thankful to be released, the little girl crept back to the bench on which she had at first been seated, and there silently gave way to the tears she had all this time repressed. A sharp dig on the shoulder made her look up, and there stood Tom Brody. He had been regaling himself in a neighbouring public-house, and, fortunately for Hetty, knew nothing of the shameful way in which she had disappointed the expectations, and crossed the schemes of the "Amalgamated Protestants." He did not even know that her examination was over.

"You meet me down at the 'Black Bull,'" said he, "at six, and don't you be a minute later. It'll take us pretty nigh two hours to get back to Althorne."

Hetty promised to be punctual. She was very hungry, having had nothing all day but the piece of dry bread she had eaten on the road, but it never occurred to Tom Brody to offer her any food, and the prospect of holding out till six was rather deplorable. She did not think much of this, however, at the moment, for a scheme had darted into her head which this long interval of liberty would give her time to perform. She determined to go up to St. Mary's and ask to speak to Miss Neville; and slipping out of the hall, she started off in the direction of the common as fast as her young legs would carry her.

Meantime Mr. Elsworthy had expressed his opinion that the "case was all moonshine." For which irreverence he was taken to task somewhat severely by his colleagues. They persisted in going on with it. Had they not come there with the express purpose of bullying the Sisters, and was it to be expected that they would quietly leave the Town Hall when not a single Sister had as yet been examined by them? So it came to pass that Sister Mabel was called for by her society name of Miss Mabel Southwell. During the little delay which had been caused by the conversation of the magistrates among themselves, young Arthur Elsworthy had whispered to his next neighbour, a quiet, respectable-looking man, who kept a stationer's shop in Kirkminster, "What a jolly little girl;" (alluding to Hetty;) "I hope they'll take her back;" (meaning into the orphanage, which was a singular aspiration for the hope of the Elsworthies.) "As to that fellow, Fox Adderly, I should like to put him under the pump."

The stationer raised his eyebrows with a look of surprise, but said nothing; after that he looked from time to time on young Elsworthy as if he were a natural curiosity.

When Sister Mabel had answered to her name—Mabel Southwell—a thrill of interest ran through the hall. A real live Sister to be baited! Rat-hunting and badger-drawing were nothing to it. Messrs. Blaber and Burke snuffed the air in triumph; Mr. Elsworthy had had his way in the examination of the two former witnesses, this one should be all their own. It is not my intention to give a detailed account of the ordeal she had to pass through. All who have ever witnessed the examination, in a so-called court of justice, of a witness convicted of being a member of a religious community, will know how, on such occasions, English gentlemen forget that they are gentlemen; and their memories will easily supply the vulgar insults, gross personalities, and shameful insinuations which are so plentifully indulged in on such occasions by lawyers, magistrates, ay, and greater than magistrates; outrages which no man alive would sit quietly by and hear his own sister subjected to.

All this Sister Mabel had now to endure. Sir Lionel Styleman sat and stared. Had the witness been his wife's dressmaker, or his butler's niece he would have interfered in her behalf; but it was not to be expected that he would do so for a "Sister of Mercy"—the thing was not to be thought of; all members of religious communities are out of the pale of Christian charity, or ordinary courtesy. That perverse Mr. Elsworthy, however, did remonstrate once or twice, and young Arthur whispered to the stationer, "By Jove, wouldn't I like to punch that fellow's head?" meaning by that irreverent expression the head of Josiah Blaber, Esq., J.P.

Amongst other things J. Blaber, Esq., called upon Sister Mabel to produce her rules.

"My rules," said she, "what rules?"

"What rules, woman, why, the rules by which you govern this orphanage of yours."

"Oh," replied the Sister, "I cannot produce them; I can repeat them if you like; I have no written copy with me."

"Do you mean to tell me, ma'am, that you have no written rules?" said Mr. Burke, putting his thumbs and forefingers together, and nodding defiantly at Sister Mabel, "that you govern solely by caprice?"

"No, I mean nothing of the kind. We have rules, but they are so simple that they are easily remembered, and some are written up in the places to which they refer. For instance," said Sister Mabel, and in spite of the unpleasantness of her situation she could not repress a merry twinkle of her eye, "there is a written rule in the dormitory that all the beds must be turned down as soon as the children leave them in the morning; and in the cloak room is one

to the effect that bonnets and cloaks must be hung on their pegs, and not left on the floor."

Mr. Elsworthy smiled.

"Who made your rules?" asked Sir Lionel Styleman sternly; he thought he was bound to ask a question now.

"Those about the beds and bonnets I made myself," replied Sister Mabel, "the general rules of the orphanage were, I believe, drawn up by Mr. Neville."

By Mr. Neville! Eye-glasses and opera-glasses were levelled at the hoary-headed sinner who had dared coerce an orphanage by rules.

"Ho, ho," said Sir Lionel, "rules by Mr. Neville! repeat them, if you please, ma'am, as you cannot produce them."

"They provide that children shall be admitted to the orphanage at any age under fourteen," said Sister Mabel quietly; "that all under seven shall be placed in the junior orphanage—St. Joseph's; that there shall never be more than forty in the senior, and twenty in the junior orphanage at the same time; that the children need not be absolute orphans, but must have lost one parent; that motherless children shall always have the preference; that as many children shall be received gratuitously as the funds will bear; that the children shall be trained for domestic service, or as school-mistresses; that they shall attend morning and evening prayers daily; (not the full Church Service, but a very short one, drawn up from the Book of Common Prayer;) and that each child shall learn daily, at least one verse of Scripture; that the children's relations shall be admitted to see them the first Sunday and Monday in every month; but that persons not nearly related to them shall not be admitted without a special order from the Superior; that they shall be allowed to visit near relations from time to time, provided they can pay their journey money."

The rules sounded simple enough, but Sister Mabel was well badgered about them, especially about the mysterious service compiled from the Book of Common Prayer, and yet not the full Church Service. This frightened Sir Lionel Styleman exceedingly. Sister Mabel explained that Mr. Neville thought the regular daily service of the Church too long for children, so in the morning they began the orphanage prayers with the introductory Versicles and Responses from the Order for Morning Prayer, after which they said the Creed, the LORD's Prayer, and the Collect for Grace; then followed the Psalms for the day, and a short portion of Scripture, on which was given the daily Scripture Lesson. That was all. Evening prayers were much the same, they were said a little before bed-time, and were distinct from the children's own private prayers; they

consisted of the Versicles from the Order of Evening Prayer, the Evening Psalms, the LORD's Prayer, the Collect for Aid against all Perils, and the Grace.

At the end of this enumeration Sir Lionel Styleman wiped his forehead. He did not know what "Versicles" might be, and had broken out in a cold perspiration at the idea of a service commencing with anything so mysteriously objectionable. Mr. Elsworthy had been reproved by his fellow-magistrates for the irrelevancy of his questions to Hetty, but it did not seem to occur to any one that the family prayers at the orphanage had nothing to do with the charge of false imprisonment against the Superior; and Mr. Blaber expressed his abhorrence of so "superstitious a practice as repeating a certain number of Psalms every day;" and unrebuked, unchecked by any one for irrelevancy, expressed the views of the "Amalgamated Protestants" upon that subject, delivering quite a homily thereon.

Sister Mabel rejoined that the practice had been found very useful, as it familiarised the children with the Psalter, and that several of them knew it by heart.

Sir Lionel turned blue with horror. What the Psalter might be he did not know, but to think of children, English children, being "familiarised" with it!

"Then, madam," said he, in a voice almost choked with emotion, "that is a very good reason why such a practice should be abolished; and the sooner the Bishop interferes the better."

Here it occurred to Mr. Elsworthy to remark that after all the "case" had not advanced one bit: that the charge had not been substantiated, indeed had been completely disproved, and that he thought the sooner they discharged the defendant and went home the better. Mr. Fleming thought so too, but mentioned he had three witnesses in reserve, if the bench were not satisfied with the refutation:—Mrs. Pilcher; Caroline Saunders, one of the orphans; and Sister Ruth, who had had charge of the culprits during their captivity.

Nobody cared to hear what Mrs. Pilcher had to say, and the "Amalgamated Protestants" by no means wished to put another "orphan" on her oath; but they grasped at the idea of being able to badger one more Sister before they dismissed the charge, as dismiss it they saw they must, so poor Sister Ruth was called up. She had listened with the fascination of terror to Sister Mabel's examination, and thought she should faint outright if she had to endure the same. She stood before the bench with every trace of colour banished from her face, and her eyes fixed in despair on Mr. Fox Adderly. The opening of his cross-examination did not tend

to reassure her. Mr. Fox Adderly knew the charge had already fallen to the ground—not all the “Amalgamated Protestants” in the United Kingdom could set it up again—but he determined to do some execution before he withdrew from the field, and as Sister Ruth was his last chance, he determined to make the most of it.

“Now, ma’am, what did you say was your name?”

“Ruth Dillon, sir.”

“Pray, Ruth Dillon, are you a maid, a wife, or a widow?”

“A widow,” replied poor Ruth, turning, if possible, even paler than before.

“I thought as much. You’re the widow, ain’t you, of that very sanctimonious gentleman, Henry Dillon, who used to be school-master here in the national school, and when he picked you up you were a nurse girl, I think?”

Sister Ruth did not reply, but with her eyes still fixed on the vulgar bully before her, stretched one hand towards Mr. Elsworthy as if in mute appeal for protection. Her observation had taught her that he was the only man of authority present, who would defend a “Sister of Mercy” from insult.

“Mr. Fox Adderly,” said that gentleman, “I cannot sit here and allow such questions to be put in such a tone.”

For once Mr. Fox Adderly had miscalculated; he fancied he had all the audience on his side, so he bowed with an air of mock humility to Mr. Elsworthy, and then continued his questionings in precisely the same tone as before. A low murmur of disapprobation, however, ran through the hall, shaping itself into the sound, “What a shame!” Hitherto no one present had connected the Sister Ruth, whose name they had heard mentioned from time to time, with Ruth Dillon, widow of Henry Dillon the late school-master of Kirkminster. She had disappeared after his death, and no one knew exactly where she had gone to; but during her residence in Kirkminster she had won much love among the parents of her husband’s scholars; and nothing could exceed Henry Dillon’s popularity with all who were brought into contact with him.

When Ruth had first made his acquaintance she was upper nurse in a family of note residing for a time in Kirkminster, and after her marriage, though not schoolmistress, she had been the schoolmistress’ right hand in matters pertaining to needlework, and regularly assisted her husband with his junior classes.

It has been already mentioned that Henry Dillon caught his death in loving ministrations among his sick scholars, and that the same disease had made his widow childless. She also had succumbed to the fever, and, it was on her partial recovery that she

had left Kirkminster for change of air, and never returning to it had been lost sight of, but not forgotten, and she stood before her former neighbours now, the gentle loving creature they had so greatly esteemed, the widow of one against whom few had dared to breathe a word, and they were determined she should not be bullied, even by a creature so greatly exalted and admired as an "Amalgamated Protestant."

Mr. Fox Adderly endeavoured to continue his examination, but again a sound, not unlike hissing, was heard, and one good Kirkminster dame exclaimed in a tone above a whisper, "Why that there blessed creetur was like a mother to my little Bill. Drat the man, if he don't keep a civil tongue in his head, I'll teach him manners." The magistrates called angrily for silence; all except Mr. Elsworthy that is, who seemed rather to enjoy the good woman's remark. But Mr. Fox Adderly had heard enough to convince him that it would not be well to put Sister Ruth under the harrow; so her examination came rather abruptly to an end, being conducted towards its conclusion solely by Messrs. Blaber and Burke, who, taking warning by the ominous sounds they had heard, did not protract it very lengthily, or carry matters with a very high hand.

Nothing, as may be supposed, was elicited from this last witness which in any way tended to strengthen the case against the Superior; and Mr. Blaber was about to tell her very surlily to stand down, when Sir Lionel Styleman bethought him to ask her how she, the widow of a person so respected as Mr. Henry Dillon, had got herself mixed up with people who used "versicles" and were familiar with the "Psalter." And by her answer to this inquiry the people of Kirkminster first became aware that the Mrs. Dillon who had won so many hearts among the poor in their town, had been herself an orphan at St. Mary's, a fatherless and motherless child knowing no other home in her childhood, and turning to it with eager longing when the home of her womanhood had been broken up.

This finished the case; it died of collapse as Sister Ruth retreated to the Superior's side and hiding her head in her cloak wept hysterically but silently.

"Hush, hush, my dear," said the Mother, "it is all over now. Control yourself, and we will get home as quickly as possible."

The crowd began swaying to and fro as every one strove to get out before his or her neighbour; but presently a little knot of persons gathered round Sister Ruth and claimed her acquaintance. She looked up and thanked them with streaming eyes and heaving shoulders, but still clinging fast to the Superior, and exclaiming, "*Oh, do get me out of this horrid place, oh, do let us get home.*"

"Bless her sweet heart," said little Bill's mother who just then pushed her way up, "she's all of a trimmle. Won't you step into my house, honey? I'll make you as welcome as the day."

Sister Ruth recognised her directly, and thanked her warmly; "But oh, Mrs. Trueman," said she, "I couldn't walk through the streets with all these people hooting and howling about, for anything. Oh dear, if we could but get home."

"I'll get yer home," said a big broad-shouldered man, little Bill's father. "Have you got e'er a carriage, ma'am, or shall I fetch you one?"

The Superior explained very civilly that they came in "Trotter's fly;" whereupon Bill's father said he would go and find the same, "And don't you go on a-frightening yourself about all they blackguards outside, if e'er a dog even opens his mouth at yer, I'll confusticate him as sure as my name's Bill Trueman;" with which comfortable assurance Mr. Trueman departed.

"Where can Mr. Neville be!" said Sister Mabel nervously, "we can never get out alone; I don't see either him or Mr. Fleming. Oh, where can they be?"

"It's no use guessing, my dear," replied the imperturbable Superior.

No more it was. The Vicar was holding Mr. Neville by a button, and conversing with him very earnestly in one window, and Mr. Fleming was talking with Mr. Elsworthy in another. Presently Mr. Trueman returned to say that Trotter's fly was at the door, and, giving his arm with a kindly courtesy to Sister Ruth, he conveyed the Sisters safely to the entrance. Just as they reached it, however, a tremendous Hi Hi-ing was heard behind the fly; the driver turned, and there was Mr. Elsworthy's splendid barouche, drawn by two spanking bays, waiting to drive up. So humble a thing as Trotter's fly dared not block the entrance by waiting to take up its passengers when such an equipage required to draw up to the door; so it promptly and meekly scrambled out of the way. Mr. Trueman swore at it; but that did no good, and the Superior begged him not to disturb himself, they would wait; and so they humbly drew back to let the magnate who owned this magnificent conveyance pass. He did not pass however, but with his two sons stood hat in hand before them. He introduced himself courteously to the Superior, (who returned his salutation with the ease and grace of a high-bred lady) and then requested to know whether she had any carriage waiting for her.

"Trotter's fly," she explained.

"Trotter's fly!" he repeated with great scorn, "my dear madam, I cannot allow you to return to St. Mary's in such a horrid rattle-

trap as that. I must beg you will use my carriage; I shall drive you home myself."

The Mother hesitated. "You are really very kind, but—"

"I insist," he interrupted smiling. "You must let me," he added speaking low, "do something to make you believe that the gentry of Kirkminster have not totally ignored all courtesy."

"Well then," said she, smiling in return, "I will accept your kind offer as frankly as it is made. Sister Ruth is so upset I will keep her with me; and Sister Mabel and Carrie shall return in the fly."

But to this Mr. Elsworthy would by no means consent. They should one and all go in the carriage. "Frank," said he to one of his boys, "run off to the fly, pay the man and tell him he is not wanted;" and away darted Frank on his errand. Just then appeared Mr. Neville accompanied by the Vicar and Mr. Fleming.

"I am sorry I could not come before, but why did you move from your place till I did come? Is the fly here?" said he.

The Superior explained that they were all returning in Mr. Elsworthy's carriage; an announcement which rendered Mr. Neville for a moment speechless with amaze.

"You will let us take you too, Mr. Neville, I hope," said Mr. Elsworthy, with marked courtesy.

"You are really very kind," replied the Chaplain, "but since the Sisters are so well protected, I think, as I am in Kirkminster, I will do myself the pleasure of accepting my friend the Vicar's invitation, and spend the evening with him."

"So be it, then," replied Mr. Elsworthy, "I pledge you my word I will take good care of these ladies. Humphry," this was to the coachman, "I am going to drive. Arthur, you will come with me; Frank, do you ride behind with Humphry. The carriage is open, madam," he observed to the Superior, "but most likely my wife has left her wrappers there. Arthur, see to them."

Arthur dragged out the wrappers, and then the astonished Kirkminsterians beheld the extraordinary spectacle of one of their own magistrates handing the defendant into his own carriage; wrapping up her and her companions with as much care as if they had been Lady Alicia Styleman or Mesdames Blaber and Burke, and finally acting as their coachman. Could they believe their eyes? They witnessed in silence this awful falling away of one of their chief county potentates; but just as the carriage was moving off, some one, probably Bill's father, shouted out that one of its occupants was "Schoolmaster Dillon's widow!" an announcement immediately answered by a cheer. Then somebody called for three

cheers for Mrs. Henry Dillon, and the Sisters who had arrived in a storm of hissings and hootings drove off amid loud hurrahs.

"You are quite a heroine, Mrs. Dillon," said Mr. Elsworthy, looking back into the carriage when they had passed the utmost confines of the crowd, "I am sure you, at least, should be satisfied." He spoke in a good-natured rallying tone, for he was quite distressed to see how upset the poor little woman was.

"Oh, thank you, sir," replied Sister Ruth; "but please drive quickly, let us get home as soon as possible."

Surely this was ungrateful of Sister Ruth, seeing the cheers had been in her honour; but perhaps she understood and valued this lip homage at its proper price; perhaps she was aware that when you get a crowd together it can be made to howl or cheer on one side or the other, or both, with great facility, if only there are some good bell-wethers to lead it. If so, what followed certainly justified her in her anxiety to get quickly away from her admirers.

The "Amalgamated Protestants," had seen with deep indignation Mr. Elsworthy's demonstration in honour of the St. Mary's Sisters; the cheers which greeted their departure were gall and wormwood to them; but they had bell-wethers among the crowd on whom they felt they could rely, and opening a communication with these by means of Mr. Saul Musket who was indefatigable on occasions such as the present, it became suddenly known—no one knew how—to the whole mob that Mr. Neville was walking down Bridge Street to the Vicarage, and it was suggested—no one knew by whom—that they should follow him. No sooner said than done, and the crowd which had just been cheering Sister Ruth, drew off from the Town Hall and streamed towards Bridge Street in search of the Chaplain of that Home which had sheltered, nurtured, and trained her. The police, being unprepared for this manœuvre, were not in time to prevent it, and before they could come to the rescue, Mr. Neville had been thrown down, covered with mud, his coat torn off his back, his hat knocked off, and his face bruised with a pretty sharp blow from a stick. At this juncture the police effected a rescue, and conveyed him safely to the vicarage door. Here as he paused for a moment to look back on his unprovoked assailants, a large stone was hurled at him, which had it struck him, would have ended his Chaplaincy of St. Mary's for ever. As it was, it providentially whizzed by him just grazing his face, and landed with great force in the hall behind him. On this the police made a rush at the aggressor, but their progress was arrested by two or three well dressed men who suggested to them significantly that it would be better not to interfere—and one of these being Mr. Saul Musket, the president of the A. P.s, the

police hesitated, and finally accepted Mr. Musket's assurance that the mob should retire from the Vicarage; which they did, marching round by the Mission House, every window of which they broke.

For this outrage and the assault on Mr. Neville two or three persons were afterwards summoned. But Mr. Elsworthy being from home at the time, the other magistrates dismissed the summons, expressing their opinion that Mr. Neville had brought it all on himself; he had no business to walk down Bridge Street when the Protestantism of the people had just been so greatly outraged; and as to the Sisters' windows being broken, why, in plain English, it served them right.

So, on the whole, though the "great case" had broken down, the "Amalgamated Protestants" were pretty well satisfied.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

WE left Hetty, hungry and tired, hastening with all speed to St. Mary's. It was a tiring walk after that long one from Althorne, and up-hill all the way; but she pushed on perseveringly, and at length reached Mr. Neville's house, which was close to, though it did not actually adjoin, the Convalescent Hospital.

She would not ring the bell, she did not want any one to see her but Miss Mary; so she paced up and down in front of the house, scanning the windows eagerly.

"Mary," said Mrs. Neville, "there is a girl outside who has been standing there I should think nearly half an hour. Go down and tell her we give no money to chance vagrants, but if she is hungry let her have something to eat."

So Mary went down on her errand just as Hetty began to despair of attracting her attention. She darted towards her as she saw her open the door, exclaiming eagerly, "Miss Mary!"

But Mary drew back with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, "Hetty Dale! how dare you come here!"

Hetty drew back aghast. There was a pause, during which Mary surveyed her with almost withering indignation.

"Miss Mary," said poor Hetty, clasping her hands, "may I speak one word to you, only one? I have come on purpose; oh, let me speak one word;" and then she burst into tears.

However indignant Mary might be, it was not in her nature to see any one weep unmoved. She softened immediately.

"I will listen to you, Hetty," she said, "but oh, who would ever have thought that you and Jemima could be so wicked as to bear false witness against the Sisters. What a heart you must have," and then Mary, who had been alternating between grief and anger all day, began to cry too.

"I did not, dear Miss Mary, I did not, indeed, indeed!" exclaimed Hetty, earnestly. "Dear Miss Mary, it was to ask you to tell Sister Ruth that I have kept my promise to her, and that I never will forget it, that I ran almost all the way here."

At this moment, Mrs. Neville with a shawl over her head came to see what "the girl wanted;" and was astonished to find both her and her daughter in tears.

"Mother, it is Hetty Dale," explained Mary, "she says she has not been giving false witness."

"I am very glad to hear it," replied Mrs. Neville, gravely; "come in, Hetty, and tell me what you have come here for."

The little girl obeyed, though she would rather have said all her say to Miss Mary only; and with many tears she told her little story, and the object of her visit. She had not seen Sister Ruth in the Town Hall, and she wanted her to know she had said the prayer she had taught her every day and every night, and oftener too than that; and she also had wished to tell Miss Mary that she had been made to come to the Town Hall, but that she had said nothing there but what was true; and true she meant always to be.

Mrs. Neville was touched, and looked kindly at her. "But, Hetty," said she, "why have you come to say all this? you know you cannot be received back here again."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I know," replied Hetty, sighing; "but I did so want Sister Ruth to know that I'd not forgot, and that I never will forget: I thought I should be happier if I knew that she knew that I was trying to prove I was sorry," and Hetty sobbed aloud.

"Stand nearer, my dear, don't cry," said the kind lady; "I will tell Sister Ruth myself. Are you still at your sister's?"

Hettie explained she had a place, and the nature of her duties, but not a word did she say of her troubles and hardships.

Mrs. Neville considered. "Well, Hetty, I am glad you are in service. Now try, my child, to earn a thoroughly good character there, for a full year at least; and then we will look out for a better place for you. Perhaps it is as well just at first that you should be near your sister."

But then Mrs. Neville knew nothing about Mrs. Brody or Mrs. Crab.

A whole year ! Oh, dear ! thought poor Hetty. Still it was a great thing to have so bright a ray of hope even at the end of such a long period ; hope is a wonderful strengthener ; and then there was always the baby. So she smiled through her tears and thanked Mrs. Neville very gratefully.

Then the lady questioned her about her journey,—how she had come from Althorne, and was concerned to find that she had walked all the way, and up there as well.

"Have you had any dinner?" she asked with thoughtful kindness. "Oh, I cannot let you go back to Kirkminster fasting," said she, when Hetty answered in the negative, and she left the room to order some food for the little girl.

"Hetty," said Mary, when they were left alone, "what a dreadfully wicked girl Jemima must be, I should think as wicked as any in the world."

Hetty hesitated ; it had occurred to her that perhaps Jemima was a victim as well as herself. She had been too frightened to hear her evidence ; and she said as much to Miss Mary, who was however only half satisfied, and was still expressing herself very strongly on the subject, when Mrs. Neville returned, herself the bearer of a plentiful dinner, and a mug of home-brewed beer. Such a dinner poor Hetty had not tasted since she had left St. Mary's. She ate and drank and felt wonderfully rested and refreshed both in body and mind. By the time she had finished, it was surprising how much brighter her future appeared. The Sisters, and especially Sister Ruth, would know she was in earnest in her endeavours to amend ; Mrs. and Miss Neville did know it, and even Mr. Neville would know it too ; and she would not be forgotten, of that she was quite sure ; they would think of her still and help her still, and if she could only earn a year's good character from Mrs. Crab (it would not be for the want of trying) she would then, joy of joys, have a place of their finding.

She was a very different Hetty as she walked leisurely back over the dear well-remembered common, to the weary-hearted, weary-footed Hetty that had climbed the hill so sadly only two hours before ; a definite aim and object was before her—a new character, restored love, regained trust. "Try !" would she not try ! And then she remembered all she had ever heard at St. Mary's about never trusting to one's own strength, but always seeking that which is from above ; and all the way as she went she kept offering continually her little prayer for grace, and help, and strength.

"Mother," said Mary, as she watched Hetty's receding figure, "surely she will be taken back when papa and the Mother Superior know how really sorry she is. No!" she exclaimed in astonish-

ment, seeing Mrs. Neville shake her head; "oh, mother, that is very hard!"

"I do not think so, dear; I should rather say very wise. Depend upon it the best thing for this girl now is that she should feel that she must win back the character she has lost. The greater hardships she meets with in doing so the better; they will give her strength of will and character. Were she restored to her former position merely because she *expressed* herself penitent, that penitence would very soon fade away; whereas if it is real it will increase with trial. This is the way GOD deals with us, Mary; He does not remove the evil we have brought upon ourselves because we say we are sorry, though we may say so very truly; but He makes that very evil the means of our spiritual advance."

Mary pondered; but Hetty's penitence having greatly moved her heart, the more so as she remembered her false suspicion against her, she was about to put in some special and exceptional plea for her which should in no way controvert Mrs. Neville's opinion, when just at that moment the sound of approaching carriage-wheels made her pause, woman-like, to look out of the window, and the sight she beheld drove Hetty, for the present at least, out of her thoughts.

"Mother, the Sisters are driving back in a beautiful private carriage! do look, whose can it be?"

Mrs. Neville looked, wondered, but was as ignorant as her daughter.

"Oh, it must all have ended quite well, I am so glad, I was sure of it," cried Mary, forgetting that she had been declaring all day that everything was sure to go "all wrong." "I must go and hear all about it; I shall be back in time to make your tea, mamma," and away she ran, bonnetless, through the convalescent hospital, threading her way along passage and cloister till she came to the Superior's private room, which opened on to a small entrance hall.

"Father," Arthur had said, as the barouche left Kirkminster and its crowds behind it, "what a rascal that man Fox Adderly is! and upon my word, I don't think Mr. Blaber or Mr. Burke are much better, and as to Sir Lionel he must be a complete fool."

Mr. Elsworthy did not reprove his heir for this strong language, neither did he reply, but he gave the offside bay a sharp flick with the whip, which that animal certainly had not deserved; and when it had done capering in resentment of the injury, he observed, "Let this be a warning to you, Arthur, never to let a miserable party spirit get the better of you either in religion or politics, but

more especially in matters of religion. We often say, 'England is a free country, every man has a right to think as he pleases, and express what he thinks;' but no man has a right to express himself in a way unbecoming a gentleman and a Christian: even if he does not happen to be a Christian, at least let him be a gentleman."

Then they were both silent, and presently Arthur resumed, "Father, do you know I am so beastly ashamed of myself."

"'Beastly ashamed!'" repeated Mr. Elsworthy, "talk English; what do you mean? what have you done to be ashamed of?"

"Father, those Guy Fawkeses."

"Ay, I was going to speak to you about them: I told you last year I did not like your mixing yourself up with what generally ends in a riot; but I think more seriously about it now."

Here he paused, and touched up both horses.

"Father," said Arthur again, colouring crimson up to the very roots of his hair, "did you know that last year we burnt the Vicar?"

Mr. Elsworthy grunted a sort of affirmative grunt of disgust; and then the nearside bay received a cut he had not merited.

Arthur was about to add that a Guy was already in progress that was to bear an accurate resemblance to Mr. Neville, but the words died on his lips. He saw his father was very much annoyed, and they neither of them spoke again till they had reached the entrance to the "Mother House" of St. Mary's.

Here Mr. Elsworthy and his sons descending, handed out the Sisters, and followed them into the hall to make their adieus.

Mary had darted out of the Mother's room to meet them, but seeing three strange gentlemen darted as quickly back again.

The Superior gracefully and cordially tendered her thanks, and then said, "As you are here, Mr. Elsworthy, will you not just walk round and cast a magisterial glance upon our establishment; you will see everything in its normal state, for nothing could have been less anticipated than your arrival here this day. If you will do so, I will go round with you myself."

The short November day had closed in, and as the portress lighted the hall gas, Mr. Elsworthy saw how fagged and worn the Superior looked.

"I really should like it very much," he said, "but not if it involves any extra fatigue to yourself. Find me another guide, and I will not refuse your kind offer."

Having put his head into this den of lions, Mr. Elsworthy really was curious to see what it was like.

Unable to deny that she was very tired, the Superior was willing

enough that some one else should play the part of cicerone ; and catching sight of Mary Neville, called her.

"Mary shall find you one. This is Miss Mary Neville, Mr. Neville's youngest daughter ; Mary, this is Mr. Elsworthy, who has been so very kind as to drive us home. Guide him to the Incurable Hospital, and then ask Sister Jane to show him all there is to be seen."

Mary curtsied, in great admiration of Mr. Elsworthy, and walked off with him, Messrs. Arthur and Frank Elsworthy following nothing loth.

"And now, dear," said the Mother to Sister Ruth, "take that pale face of yours off to bed, and your tea shall be brought to you. Sister Mabel, go and rest ; if your head is like mine, it must be splitting : Carrie will look after you, I know."

She kissed them both, gave her orders quietly to the portress, bid no one disturb her till she rang her bell, and then went into her own room, locked the door, and gave way for the first time to a burst of nervous weeping.

Mr. Elsworthy found the bright animated girl by his side a very pleasant companion. Though perfectly free from everything approaching to forwardness, she was not in the least shy, and answered all his questions with a frankness that delighted him.

"And you have lived here all your life?" said he, pausing as they reached the Incurable Hospital.

"Not exactly here, sir," replied Mary, laughing, "but in my father's house, the chaplain's house that is, which almost joins St. Mary's ; that is to say, it is only a few yards from St. Luke's, the Convalescent Hospital ; it almost touches it."

"And you are never dull?" continued Mr. Elsworthy, looking with interest on her sunny laughing face.

"Dull, oh, dear no," said Mary, "I am always a great deal too busy to be dull." So saying she opened the door, and they found themselves within the day-ward of St. Barnabas' Hospital.

It is not my intention to write a guide book of St. Barnabas', so I will not here describe the place, but only say that the inmates were all at tea and looked very happy and contented ; and that Mary introduced Mr. Elsworthy to the Sister Superior, who was presiding at the head of the table, and gave her the Superior's message.

Here Mr. Elsworthy found so much to interest him, and Sister Jane's intelligence, and quiet enthusiasm about her work so delighted and fascinated him, that the incurables had time to finish their tea, and begin clearing it away,—and Mary had introduced the young Elsworthys to some of the inmates whom she

considered the most interesting—to wit the most afflicted ;—and the young Elsworthys had cracked innumerable jokes with the delighted patients, and still he lingered.

Finding that Sister Jane was explaining to him some super-excellent system of ventilation which had been applied to the dormitories, and thinking the subject uninteresting, the young people withdrew into a bay window and conversed apart ; Frank giving Mary an account of that day's proceedings with so much drollery, and such unsparing mimicry of Mr. Fox Adderly and the magistracy of Kirkminster, that she laughed till the water stood in her eyes.

"Oh dear," she said, when at length he paused, "I wish I had seen them, what fun it must have been."

"Indeed," said Arthur, "it wasn't at all funny at the time, though it may seem so now, it was very disgusting."

"Ah," said Mary, looking serious in a moment, as she remembered what her feelings had been all that day, "so it must have been ; I am glad I was not there, unless indeed I could have been a man."

"And what would you have done had you been a man ?" asked Mr. Elsworthy, smiling, as he overheard this last remark.

Mary laughed, and retreated behind Sister Jane, but did not answer. When however they reached the lower cloister leading to the orphanage, she explained confidentially to Arthur, "Why, had I been a man, I would have stood up in the court and made a speech, and told these people—the magistrates, I mean—that they ought to be utterly ashamed of themselves."

"Papa is a magistrate," observed Frank, mischievously, "you can tell him that now."

"Oh, I do not mean magistrates like Mr. Elsworthy ; he is not an 'Amalgamated Protestant ;' don't you hate them ?"

To this very improper question of Miss Neville's, Messrs. Arthur and Frank Elsworthy replied with great readiness and warmth, that they utterly hated, detested, and abhorred the "Amalgamated Protestants." These reprehensible sentiments being at that moment peculiarly acceptable to the young lady, she became more confidential, and proceeded to enlighten her companions as to the enormities committed by these objects of her dislike. "Only think," said she, "what they did last Guy Fawkes day ; I'm sure you'll never believe it, no one could possibly believe it unless they knew it was true ;" she dropped her voice to an impressive whisper, "they actually burnt the Vicar !"

Now here was a disagreeable form for the conversation to take ! They, then, Arthur and Frank Elsworthy, were the objects of Miss Neville's dislike and scorn, for their consciences reminded them

that they had been the most active of the Vicar's executioners; and the same inward monitor whispered to Arthur that he had not only assisted in the construction of the Vicar's effigy, but its nose, which was considered a masterpiece, and constituted its strongest point of resemblance to that Reverend gentleman, was the work of his genius and artistic skill, and had been highly lauded by all his kinsfolk and friends. The two lads looked sheepishly at one another, but did not speak. Worse, however, was to come.

"And that's not all," continued Mary Neville, pausing at the orphanage door. "They're going to do something much worse this 5th of November; I have heard from several people that they're going to burn papa!" She was nearly crying now; and the young Elsworths felt very hot and uncomfortable. It was one thing to burn the effigy of a horrible "Jesuitical" monster, who kept unhappy women and children captive in a frightful prison, and made away with them secretly in "packing-cases," or built them up in the wall, or reduced them to lunacy if they happened to look out of a window, or sneeze at prayers—and such a being was the Mr. Neville of the "Amalgamated Protestants;" and quite another thing to burn a resemblance of that fine old English gentleman with his snow-white hair, broad, intellectual forehead, calm, mild eyes, and noble bearing, whom they had seen for the first time in the Town Hall that day; a gentleman, whom this very pretty girl called "papa" with such sweet pathos, and whom she seemed to love with all a daughter's truest devotion. It occurred to Frank that he should not like any one to burn an effigy of his father; and Arthur's reflections were even more unpleasant. Their cheeks burned, their ears tingled, and they wished Mary would move from before the orphanage door, that they might enter and hide their confusion among numbers. But the Priest's daughter did not perceive their discomfort; the large tears which had gathered in her eyes, and presently rolled down her cheeks, prevented her seeing anything distinctly, so she maintained her position as she added, clenching her little hand, "Oh, if I could but be a man, only just for once."

"Why, what would you do, Miss Neville?" said Arthur, trying to rally himself.

"What would I do!" repeated Mary in scorn, "why, I'd take a most tremendous horsewhip, and I'd go single-handed amongst them; they're sure to be dreadful cowards—men so unmanly must be shocking cowards, and I'd beat every one that I could catch, so that he should remember it every Guy Fawkes day as long as he lived. That's the only punishment such creatures are fit for, the only one they would feel."

Now this sounds a very hoydenish speech for a young lady, a clergyman's daughter, to make; but it was not said in at all a hoydenish, or "fast" manner; and so the young Elsworthys perceived. They felt, as she stood there before them, with her hand outstretched in her vehemence, her expressive face glowing with the fire of a righteous scorn, and speaking in a low earnest voice, that her words were the overflowing of a young heart's withering contempt for that which was base, and mean, and vile.

Arthur Elsworthy felt as if he could never look any one in the face again. He could not but take her words to himself. If she knew all, he would be to her a "creature," and a creature only fit to be horsewhipped! Here was a condition for the heir of the Elsworthys; he stood completely cowed before a girl so young that her petticoats were still up to her ancles. And in his boy's heart he went all lengths with her. He thought her the "jolliest" as well as the prettiest girl he had ever seen; and longed to do something to win her good opinion. How this could be done he pondered all the time they were finishing their round of the establishment. Whilst they were taking leave of the Superior he came to something like a decision. "Miss Neville," said he, stammering and blushing as she came up to him with frank, outstretched hand to say good-bye, "if I prevent that—that that you know of—will you promise never to think of me as an 'Amalgamated Protestant?'"

She laughed merrily. "I don't think you are at all like one, I should never think of you as one. But if indeed you prevent that—only I don't see how you can—I will love you very much; oh, very much indeed! as much as if you were my brother."

This was plain speaking, certainly! and something to look forward to. Frank put in his claim to a share in this proffered regard, enforcing it by a declaration that sooner than Mr. Neville should be roasted in effigy he would be the Guy himself.

They parted excellent friends; Mr. Elsworthy expressing a hope that Mrs. Neville would allow Mary to come up to Highfield and make acquaintance with his daughters. "Do you ever dance, Miss Neville?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, when I can," replied she.

"When you can!" said Frank, "but when can you? You can't dance up in the hospital with all those cripples."

Mary laughed. "Sometimes I go into the orphanage and dance with the children there; sometimes I dance with the Home girls. And then I have some cousins, the Stevens, they live only about three miles from here, and sometimes I go and dance with them; that is to say when I have time," she added, "for I have almost as much as I can do looking after papa and mamma."

Mr. Elsworthy smiled. He had taken her hand to say good-bye, and kept it in his whilst she enumerated her various spheres of gaiety. "Are they such very troublesome people?" he asked, in a tone of amusement.

She looked brightly up in his face. "Mamma is often, very often, poorly, and so I am housekeeper; and papa writes a great deal, and I make fair copies of his horrible scrawls which no printer could read, I am sure. I am always busy."

"And happy?" said Mr. Elsworthy, looking down on the sweet, laughter-loving face.

"Oh, as happy and merry as the day is long."

No one could look at her and doubt it. Mr. Elsworthy pressed the little hand before he released it, saying, "Well, some day when Mrs. Neville can spare her little housekeeper, and Mr. Neville can do without his amanuensis, come and see my girls, and let them see that there is more sunshine than people dream of about St. Mary's."

The Superior came to the door to see her guests off; and she and Mary stood there—the latter with her arm round the Mother's waist—till the carriage was out of sight.

"Do you not like them very much, my Mother?"

"Very much, dear."

"I should like to go to Highfield, Mother."

"And I should like you to go."

"Mother, Mr. Arthur Elsworthy is going to prevent the 'Amalgamated Protestants' from burning papa."

The Superior smiled. "Is he, my dear?" The subject recalled her troubles, but she did not show it. "I wonder if your father has come home."

"My goodness me!" exclaimed Mary, "how late it is; I quite forgot. And unless one of the servants has made the tea poor mamma has had none all this time."

"My goodness me" is a very ugly expression, Mary."

"So it is, my Mother; it is lucky papa did not hear. You shall scold me for it to-morrow; I will come up on purpose." And with a fond embrace, Mary ran off to see after the neglected tea.

"And so there was nothing in it!" exclaimed Marion Elsworthy, in a tone of disappointment. "It has been 'much ado about nothing.' I am quite disappointed."

"And so is Miss Wrigley," chimed in Ernestine, "she has almost finished her story about the 'Young Protestant;' and now it's all nonsense, and not true, so she won't be able to publish it."

But Miss Wrigley did not see this. In her opinion the absence of sense and truth were no more a bar to the publication of her work than to the proceedings of the "Amalgamated Protestants"

in general. So the story was completed, and sent to her publisher, and appeared in due time in a popular magazine with its original title unaltered, "The Young Protestant; founded on fact:" and a foot-note by the editor stated that the "fact" on which it was founded had occurred in "a well-known conventual establishment near K——r, in ——shire;" and though the said magazine had a large circulation, and so carried the "fact" far and wide,—as far and wide even as the Colonies—yet as it never happened to fall into the hands of any one personally connected with St. Mary's, it remained uncontradicted with legions of its kind; those who knew it to be a lie allowing it to pass unquestioned as no business of theirs; and contenting themselves with the reflection that if not true it might have been; or at all events they wished it had been.

"I'll tell you what," said Ernestine, the next morning at breakfast, "I do believe Arthur is in love with that Miss Neville. Do you know, mamma, he and Frank have done nothing but talk about her, ever since they came home yesterday. Frank calls her 'Miss Neville,' but Arthur speaks of her as 'Mary Neville;' only think, mamma. Fancy calling her 'Mary' when he had never seen her in his life before!"

"It looks suspicious," said Mrs. Elsworthy, smiling.

"How can you talk such preposterous nonsense, Ernestine!" exclaimed her brother, colouring furiously.

Mr. Elsworthy looked up from his newspaper and laughed.

"Papa is quite as bad as Arthur," said Marion, "he says he has asked her up here."

Miss Wrigley coughed an awful ghostly cough behind her hand.

"I am sure Arthur may do all the entertaining then," said Ernestine. "I don't want to make acquaintance with people out of nunneries." Ernestine had read all that was then written of the "Young Protestant," and was disposed to resent the failure of its foundation.

"I'll tell you what—" said Arthur angrily.

At that moment the butler entered. "If you please, sir, the young Mr. Mummerys have called to ask Mr. Arthur if he could come down to them to-day about the Guy."

Ernestine clapped her hands. "And the Guy is to be Mr. Neville! oh, what fun! Fancy Arthur assisting at the burning of the fair Mary's father in effigy. How pleased she will be when she hears of it!"

Arthur darted an angry glance at her, but disdaining to reply, left the room in silence, followed precipitately by Frank, as eager as he to stop the mischief they had themselves so largely aided in *setting afloat*.

But they found, alas! as too many have found before them, that it is easier to set mischief in motion, than to stop it when once astir. Persuasions, representations, entreaties, and finally threats, were quite unavailing to induce the Messrs. Mummery to give up their intentions. The discussion was very fierce, and seemed tending to a breach of the peace, when Mr. Elsworthy, warned by a timely hint from the butler, appeared on the scene. He blamed Arthur and Frank for their violence, but took their side. After expressing himself in pretty strong language as to what he considered the "blackguardism" of the act, he concluded with, "Now mind, I absolutely forbid this public insult to Mr. Neville; as a magistrate I forbid it. The whole affair of Guy Fawkes day is senseless and mischievous; but the burning of living persons in effigy is absolutely disgusting."

With that he went off, followed by his sons, thinking the affair was ended. But little the Mummerys and their followers cared for him. In the first place he was that very day going to Town, and would be absent at least ten days; secondly, he was but one against them. With this one exception the whole bench of magistrates were on their side. Sir Lionel Styleman, Mr. Blaber, Mr. Burke, and other celebrities too numerous to mention had contributed liberally, not only to the bonfire and fireworks, but to the Guy, which was to be got up with unusual care, and regardless of expense. The Messrs. Mummery did not openly defy Mr. Elsworthy, however; they let him suppose he would be obeyed, and walked off, quietly resolved to do even more than they had originally intended, and show the young Elsworths that Kirkminster could do without them on the 5th of November.

"They do say the gentleman has been killed, sir," said the coachman, as he drove his master off in the dog-cart.

"Killed, who?" asked Mr. Elsworthy.

Whereupon Humphry gave him his version of the attack on Mr. Neville the previous afternoon. Mr. Elsworthy was much distressed. He did not in the least suppose that Mr. Neville had been "done to death," but he knew enough of Kirkminster mobs to be pretty sure he had sustained some very serious annoyance, if not injury, and would have stayed to investigate it, but that he was bound on matters of business that admitted of no delay. On his arrival in Town he wrote to his brother magistrates, urging them to deal severely with the cowardly assailants, and despatched a little note to Mr. Neville expressive of his utter disgust at the outrage perpetrated upon him.

We know that Mr. Neville had not been killed as Humphry had opined; but he was more shaken and hurt than he cared to confess.

Mr. Fleming drove him home that evening in his own trap. "I will go with you," he said; "even if they recognize you, they will hardly dare to touch a lawyer, so I will be your guard." He got out too at the Chaplain's house, thinking he might prevent Mrs. Neville from being as much alarmed as she otherwise might be at her husband's appearance.

"Papa! what has happened?" exclaimed Mary, as her father advanced into the light. "Mother, his coat is torn, and all over mud; and father, what is that on your face?"

Mrs. Neville turned deadly pale and sat down unable to speak. Then Mr. Fleming tried to make light of the matter, and invest it with a comic aspect, and Mr. Neville aided him with all his power. But even Mary perceived that her father had been assaulted and struck, and the experience of other and sadder days gave Mrs. Neville a clue to what had really happened. Mr. Fleming stayed chatting and laughing till he thought Mrs. and Miss Neville must have recovered any shock their nerves might have sustained, and then taking a cheerful, if not merry, farewell, re-entered the "trap," convinced that Mrs. Neville had not taken the misadventure much to heart.

He was mistaken, however. She had exerted herself to say a few words to him, and even to smile in answer to his remarks, but it was a great effort, and as soon as he was gone, the motive for exertion being removed, she sank back on the sofa shuddering from head to foot. Her husband leant over her speaking soothing words.

"John," she murmured, clasping her hands convulsively, "is it all going to begin over again? Oh, I could not live through it again."

He put his arm round her, and let her head droop on his bosom.

"Mary," he said, turning to his daughter, who was standing by watching her mother and himself with an expression of terrified sorrow, "I should like a cup of tea. Get me one, my dear."

Mary went off instantly on her errand.

"Katy," he whispered, when they were alone, "where is your courage, where is your zeal, your faith?"

"Gone, gone, I think," she moaned. "Oh, John, what I could bear once I cannot bear again. Forgive me, my husband, but my strength seems to have ebbed all away, and the very thought of all that brutal violence over again seems to kill me."

He did not reason with her, but tenderly soothed her, laid her back on her pillow, and then, still holding her hand in his, turned and spoke cheerfully to Mary who returned with the tea.

He had asked for it, to give her something to do, but it stood *untasted* by him, till with trembling hand his daughter brought the

cup close to him, and begged him to take it. He complied, smiling, and spoke of one or two events in the busy world without which he thought would interest them. But how could they be interested in anything but that bruised face? Mary felt herself choking with sobs, but was determined not to give way.

"Now get your mother off to bed, Mary, she is poorly and tired; to-morrow we shall be able to talk of all this quietly."

It was long however before the sick woman could be composed to rest; and it was late in the night when her daughter softly left her room and stole down stairs to her father. He was sitting by the fire, his arm on the table, his head on his hand, lost in thought. She crept into his arms. "Papa, do let me cry," she said, and without waiting for permission, she clasped his neck with both her arms, laid her head on his shoulder, and wept unrestrainedly.

He did not check her, but when her sobs had ceased, and she had raised her head, and kissed again and again the bruised cheek, and twisted her fingers lovingly in his white hair, he looked at her with one of his brightest smiles and said, "Mary, you are not worthy to be a Priest's daughter."

"Not worthy, father darling?"

"No; you are far too chicken-hearted. What has happened to-day, my girl, that we might not take as a matter of course? Who was it that said, 'Ye shall be hated of all men for My Name's sake?' And again, 'The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household.' Have you forgotten this, my darling?"

"No, father, my own father; but it is so hard to realise."

"It is hard, but you must do it, Mary. These are hard times, and call for hardness. Every member of the Church Militant down to the feeblest child has a work for the Church to do." He paused, then added, "Your poor mother's bodily strength has failed, Mary, and now you must be as a mother to her,—you must give her of your young strength. There is much for you to do, my child, without fainting or failing." He pressed her closer to him. "You must be my *friend*, Mary; you little know how heavy a Priest's heart is sometimes; how prone to despair, to say with Elijah, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.' You must hold up my hands, Mary, when I am faint-hearted, you must assist me by your prayers. Oh, my child, you do not know how much I need your assistance."

His voice failed, and to his daughter's terror a tear stole down his cheek. The sight of a man in tears Mary had never witnessed,

her father too, whom she had ever considered a tower of strength! Her young heart froze with dismay, and sliding from his arms, she sank at his feet and clasped his knees. His emotion was soon past, however, and ashamed of his momentary weakness, he lifted her up and seating her again on his knee, spoke more cheerfully.

But Mary had received an impression that was never effaced. The thought that this wise and learned man, this grey-haired saint, this faithful ordained Priest of the Most High wanted *her* help—even *hers*—a feeble girl; that she could strengthen the hands of one of the Church's bravest combatants awed her into silence. She spoke little more that night, but she clung to her father with an almost worshipping tenderness, stroked back his white hairs, and showered kisses, reverent kisses, on his brow, his eyes, and chiefly on the wounded cheek. When at length he dismissed her to bed, and she had knelt for his blessing, she retired to her own little room, but not to sleep.

There was a fire burning now within her. She was *necessary* to him. *She* was to be the "help meet for him." She did not know her mother's days were numbered, but she did know her mother could never be that "help meet for him" again. He could not confide his sorrows and trials to her now; he must rather conceal them from her; and she, Mary, must be the friend, the comforter of both. This then was her vocation. Her heart thrilled with joy, and kneeling, she dedicated herself to it solemnly with all the fervour and strength of her young heart.

She met her father the next morning with a look of innocent exultation,—was she not now his acknowledged fellow-labourer; were they not to work together for the same high aim, the advancement of the Church, and the glory of God's great Name?

"Well, Mary, how is mamma?"

"Oh, bonny. She has had her breakfast, and has dozed off as nicely as possible." Then she gave him his breakfast, and ought properly to have taken her own, but she could not separate herself from him the whole width of the table. So after hovering over him, and giving him furtive kisses on his hands and head, she finally brought her breakfast-cup and plate round close to his side, and ate her meal there with much contentment.

"One would suppose you thought there was an 'Amalgamated Protestant' in ambush under the table, Mary," he said, smiling, "you watch me so closely."

"Father, shall you have any writing for me to do, when I have finished my housekeeping, and dressed mamma?"

"Yes, plenty, and some Greek quotations for you to transcribe."

She thanked him with another kiss.

On the evening before Guy Fawkes day, the servant put a note into her hand, saying that Mr. Elsworthy's coachman had left it. Mary read it, put it into her pocket, and said nothing about it till her mother was gone to bed, then she gave it to her father.

It was as follows,—

"Highfield, Nov. 4.

"DEAR MISS NEVILLE,

"I greatly fear you will think I deceived you when I held out hopes of being able to prevent the 'Amalgamated Protestants' from offering any further outrage to your father to-morrow. This afternoon I hear that what you so greatly feared will certainly take place, and there is some talk of the mob coming up to St. Mary's. No one will interfere, and my father is in town. I have told Mr. Fleming, and by his orders some police will be with you early to-morrow morning. Frank and I are very unhappy, and we want you to ask Mr. Neville to forgive us for any insult we have at any time offered him. Our only excuse is that we did it, I imagine, because we were too great fools to think. We have written to apologise to the Vicar for what happened last year, for we were both mixed up with that.

"I remain, dear Miss Neville, faithfully yours,
"ARTHUR ELSWORTHY."

"I could not have believed," said Mary, "that he could ever have mixed himself up with those horrid people."

"Never mind what he has done," replied Mr. Neville; "people, especially young people, often do very foolish, and even wrong things, simply because (as he says) they are 'too great fools to think;' but they are wise people indeed who see their folly, openly acknowledge it, make what reparation they can, and then abjure it. I shall write and tell him so. I have never seen this young man but once, I think, nevertheless I am sure from that note alone that he is a very fine fellow."

The next morning came a note from Mr. Fleming. In consequence of young Elsworthy's information he had communicated with the police, and asked for a guard for St. Mary's.

The Inspector had thereupon made inquiries, and had been assured by Mr. Saul Musket, and other leading members of the "Amalgamated Protestants," that nothing more than the usual Guy Fawkes demonstration would take place with its customary procession. That it might certainly compass St. John's Common, indeed it was necessary that it should do so, as the bonfire this year was not to be on Mr. Blaber's property, as usual, but on St.

John's Common, by permission of Sir Lionel Styleman, Lord of the Manor, who had contributed a guinea and three dozen faggots towards it. But the Inspector might be sure that there would be no mob, no rioting, nothing to annoy the most sensitive nature; merely the usual harmless fun and frolic.

The Inspector grunted a grunt of dissent at Mr. Saul Musket's idea of harmless frolic. It had included, the year before, the chaining together of lighted tar-barrels, which were then rolled down the High Street; but he could not interfere with fun and frolic subscribed for by the Magistrates themselves; and he told Mr. Fleming a guard for St. Mary's was out of the question; the inmates must take their chance; there would, of course, be a certain number of police on the ground.

Mr. Fleming's letter was to warn Mr. Neville of the intended "fun" on St. John's Common, and to advise him to send Mrs. Neville, if possible, away from home for a day or two.

But this was not possible. The note did not reach the Chaplain till mid-day; and knots of idlers were already gathering round the house. By the time a carriage could be procured, and a place of refuge decided on, the crowd would have mustered pretty strong. In this dilemma the Mother Superior came to the rescue.

"Katy," she said to the poor unnerved wife, "I want you to spend this afternoon quietly with me. To-day you know is a Kirkminster holiday, and the bonfire is to be on the Common, so that there will be a crowd about, and I know your aversion to crowds; you will not care to see them from your windows; and I want to consult you about our lending library, Sister Christine says you know more about it than any one."

She spoke so quietly and indifferently that Mrs. Neville fell into her trap. She did not indeed want to see a crowd, but then she asked with a sudden start of fear, would there be any danger,— "Will John be safe?" she inquired with painful vehemence.

"Dear Katy," replied the Superior in the same cool tone, "you know what these holidays are,—a good deal of cheering, a good deal of pickpocketing, a large consumption of good winter fuel, and, I believe, some really beautiful fireworks. By the way," she added, "Jesuit" that she was, "perhaps you would like to see them, they are really costly, I believe; if so, come to-morrow about the library."

Mrs. Neville protested that she did not care about fireworks; but perhaps Mary would like to see them.

Mary catching her "Jesuitry" from the Superior, declared she should like to see the fireworks of all things.

"Very well then, you and Mr. Neville shall stay and see them,

and mamma and I will go and 'do' the library, like incurious, practical creatures that we are."

The ruse succeeded perfectly. Poor Mrs. Neville was quite pleased that Mary should have an opportunity of seeing a pretty sight without any trouble; and seated comfortably in the Superior's little room, which looked into the enclosed garden, and was quite removed from the scene of riot, she heard the distant cheering and the banging of the fireworks without a misgiving.

The procession began at three. The bonfire was to be lighted as soon as it was dark, for the satellites of the "Amalgamated Protestants" wanted plenty of time afterwards to drink themselves drunk at the public-houses, and the magistrates were rigidly virtuous in compelling these to close at midnight. All Kirkminster turned out on these occasions, the neighbouring gentry either attended themselves, or sent their children to see the "fun."

Mary watched all the proceedings from an upper window. Her father was writing in his own room as tranquilly as if "Amalgamated Protestants" did not exist; but when the mob surged round the house with howls and yells and blasphemies, she joined him.

"Well, Mary, how are our friends getting on?"

"On the other side of the house you can distinguish what they say," replied Mary, "and I did not care to hear it, so I have come here. Not because I am afraid, papa, not because I am afraid."

Struck by the tone of her voice he looked up at her. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled unnaturally,—she had seen the "Guy." The face was of wax, or some such composition, it had been constructed with great care, and at considerable expense, and bore a fearful though caricatured likeness to the man it was designed to insult, as, attired in surplice and stole, it was displayed by the "Amalgamated Protestants" before the windows of his own house.

Mary stayed with her father till dusk, when, as she left the room to give orders about his tea, one of the maids informed her that the bonfire was lighting. "It's really a pretty sight, miss, do look out."

They stood together looking out. It had been reared and lighted as near the Chaplain's house as possible, so that they could distinctly see all that happened.

"Oh, miss," exclaimed the maid, "what ever are they going to do? Mercy! sure they're never going to burn that image?"

The "image" was at this moment brought forward, seated in a chair, and placed close to the fire, which now blazed up bonnily; three men then advanced, and with pitchforks lifted it into the centre of the burning mass. The effect was so hideously life-like, that the maid hid her face and screamed, while the cook, who

had followed them into the room, tried to draw Mary from the window.

"Come away, Miss Mary, come away. It's not a fit sight for you. God help the poor missis, I'm glad she's safe out of the way. It's as if the master himself was burning. Oh, what hearts they wretches must have, they're prodging it with their pitchforks. Oh, Miss Mary dear, do come away, indeed it's not fit for you to see."

Both the maids were crying, for they loved their master dearly; but there were no tears in Mary's eyes. The scene was really horrible; the howling, blaspheming mob, striking with sticks and pitchforks at the burning life-like figure, which had apparently been modelled in some hard composition, as it burned but slowly; and the figure itself in the midst of the fire swaying to and fro with the blows; but Mary would not or could not take her eyes off it. It fascinated her with a horrible fascination. Not till it was entirely consumed and nothing remained but a heap of glowing embers, did she suffer the cook to lead her away. The good woman who had lived in the family long before Mary was born was concerned at her silence. She would rather have had her cry and complain.

"Now don't ye take on, my honey love," she said, "just think how the poor missis depends on you; and as to the master, he's an angel from heaven, and nothing on earth 'll be able to hurt him, let alone these Protestant blackguards."

She had wished to hear her young mistress speak, but she was startled and frightened when the girl suddenly threw her arms round her neck, exclaiming in a tone, the like of which she had never heard from her before, "Davis, it was murder! it was deadly, deliberate murder! They would have burnt papa if they could; they would have struck at him with pitchforks, had they been able. They did what they could, and as much as they could. They are murderers in the sight of God!"

"So they are, dear, so they are," said the sympathising woman, "and a murderer's fate will be theirs if there's any justice in Heaven. But Miss Mary dear, bathe your face, it is so flushed and burning, the master will be worrying about you if you go to him like that, and then think of the missis."

Mary bathed her face, but did not succeed in washing away the crimson flush. It was still on her cheeks as she stood before her father.

"You should not look at fireworks, Mary, if you become a combustible in consequence," he said, smiling.

"Father," said Mary, in a low, earnest voice, without any answering smile, "is it wrong to feel as I do now?"

"How is that, my child?"

"Father, if I could have rushed out upon them and killed them, I would," said the girl, fiercely, "I wished that the fire they were surrounding could have taken hold of them."

Mr. Neville knew in a moment what she had seen. He folded her in his arms. "That is much such a spirit as they had who said, 'LORD, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?' You know the answer, He *rebuked* them and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' Your feelings, my Mary, natural as they are, are those which have caused religious wars and steeped the world in bloodshed. Hate the evil, my child, you cannot hate that too much, but not the doers of the evil. After all, the majority of them have sinned but in ignorance; come, let us pray for them."

He knelt down with her, holding her feverish hands in his, and offered up a short, fervent prayer for these ignorant, misguided people, and for those who led them astray; then kissing her fondly, he said, "Before you go to bed to-night, Mary, meditate for at least ten minutes on the mocking of our dearest LORD in the guard-room of the Roman soldiers, and then ask yourself whether it is not rather a joy to be admitted to some participation in the scorn which overwhelmed Him. But here is mamma," he whispered, "forget all you have seen, my darling."

When Mrs. Neville, accompanied by the Superior, entered, there was nothing in her husband's or daughter's manner to indicate that anything had disturbed them. She did not fail to ask if Mary had had a good view of the fireworks. "Very good," Mary said, "but she did not think she should ever care to see any again."

Mrs. Neville said she thought they were scarcely worth seeing a second time; and then she spoke of the new arrangements she and the Superior had been making in the library.

The following morning the young Elsworthys drove over in the dog-cart, with flowers and fruit for Mrs. Neville from their mother, and a note inviting Mary to spend a day with them. Mr. Neville received them at the door, and cautioned them not to allude to the "Guy" in his wife's hearing. Mrs. Neville was quite delighted with her visitors, and their mother's gifts, and anxious that Mary should avail herself of her kind invitation. But Mary was strangely unwilling. She made innumerable excuses, and was only silenced at last by seeing that her mother was annoyed with her. So it was settled she should go, and that a day should be fixed as soon as Mr. Elworthy returned from town.

When this was settled, Arthur followed Mr. Neville into his room, and with tears in his eyes expressed his grief and indignation at what had occurred the day before, and his self-reproach at ever having been mixed up in such doings.

Mr. Neville took his hand, and pressed it kindly.

"Ah, my young friend," said he,

"' Evil is wrought by want of thought
As much as want of heart.'

We are all too apt to forget that."

"I will try to remember it, sir," replied Arthur, sighing, "I will write it up in my room."

"Mary shall make an illuminated scroll of it for you, and you shall receive it as a keepsake from me, and a pledge that by-gones are by-gones and nothing more."

Young Elsworthy coloured with pleasure; and he and Frank having lingered as long as they could, finally took a cordial farewell, and departed.

"Mr. Arthur," said Humphry, as they approached the post-office, "don't you forget Miss Wrigley's packet, sir?"

"Oh, blow the packet," said Arthur, "I'd as nearly forgotten it as possible. Here, get the thing stamped, and drop it into the box."

On his return, he was able to report that it had been safely posted. It was "The Young Protestant, founded on fact," but Arthur did not know that.

"Here, Mary, is some work for you," said Mr. Neville; "you have done no illuminating for a long time; I want you to do two scrolls: this first," and he put in her hands a paper on which were the two lines he had quoted to Arthur. "This is to be my gift to your friend young Elsworthy."

"Really," said Mary, laughing, "then I suppose I must do my best. But what is the other, papa? you said you wanted two."

"I want this to put over the door in my study, that I may see it whenever I leave its shelter."

Mary looked at the slip he held in his hand. It bore these words, "Through evil report and good report."

"Ah, papa," she said, as the tears gathered fast in her eyes, "it seems all the first and none of the second."

"Not quite that, my Mary," replied her father, as he placed in her hand a very kind note he had just received from Mr. Elsworthy, (containing a £10 note for the orphanage,) and laid a bunch of the *grapes* Mrs. Elsworthy had sent before her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARY'S PUPIL.

IT was a matter of no small wonder to every one who knew anything of the proceedings on St. John's common that the windows of the establishments of St. Mary and St. John, or at least those of the Chaplain's house, escaped unbroken; and few persons wondered more than Mr. Fleming. On inquiry, however, it turned out that Sir Lionel Styleman, after he had granted permission, as lord of the manor, for the bonfire to be erected just in front of Mr. Neville's house, had been so nervous as to the consequences, and so frightened by a letter from Mr. Elsworthy containing some very strong opinions lately adopted by that gentleman in reference to Guy Fawkes day, that he had called on Messrs. Blaber, Burke, Musket, and Bliss, and had exacted from them a promise that there should be no destruction of property, or injury to any person or persons belonging to the Sisterhood,—a promise these worthies gave the more willingly as they themselves were rather startled by the spirit they had called up, and somewhat abashed by Mr. Elsworthy's plain speaking.

So they summoned their trusty brethren, of whom they had always a large staff, and instructed them to concentrate the fury of the mob upon the bonfire and effigy, and on no account to damage the windows, &c.; and so well did these valuable allies obey their leaders' commands, (and there being moreover no stones handy,) that their frolics caused no one at the Mother House to be out of pocket. They indemnified themselves, however, for this forbearance by again breaking all the windows in the Mission House which had just been mended after the destruction on the 1st. But this may have been an act of neighbourly benevolence. It is possible the glazier was short of work.

Of course all the doings on the 1st and 5th were duly chronicled in various papers, and so charmed were the respective editors by the self-denial of the crowd on the common in abstaining from the destruction, or at least the damage of St. Mary's, that many of them rewarded the Kirkminsterians with a leader; in which after lauding the "good temper," and "love of fun and frolic peculiar to English mobs" in general, and to Kirkminsterians in particular, all the articles went on to give a sketch historical and so forth of the "great national observance of Guy Fawkes day," and to declare that in their opinion, i.e. that of the Messrs. Brown, Jones,

Robinson, Smith, and Green, who wrote the articles, Guy Fawkes day was the great palladium of Church and State, and could never be abolished without imminent danger to the latter and the certain destruction of the former. The same papers contained very severe animadversions on the Home and its Chaplain, and could not sufficiently express their abhorrence and disgust at the "effrontery" and "unparalleled impudence" of the latter in daring to summons the men who had struck him with a stick in the face, thrown him down, torn his coat, covered him with mud, and afterwards hurled a great stone at him.

There are persons who believe that a newspaper article must and does necessarily dictate the line of thought and argument proper to its readers, and that this dictation is invariably followed. Singularly enough, this is not always the case. Amongst the readers of the "*Kirkminster Independent*,"—a very independent paper indeed, independent especially of such unimportant trifles as truth, honour, and the opinion of honest men—one there was who, after acquainting himself with the editor's opinions on the subject of the assault on Mr. Neville, &c., expressed a very fervent desire to "punch" that gentleman's head.

It would have taken Mark Staunton too long to spell out the whole story for himself, so he got his mate, Bill Collins, to read it to him, repaying him for his trouble by a very spirited commentary on the text.

Fair weather or foul Mark Staunton had never omitted his Sunday walk to St. Mary's ever since Mr. Neville had offered him the privilege. And on the Sunday following the great Protestant demonstration he set off as usual after breakfast, but, for the first time, carrying with him a tremendous crab-stick, full of portentous knobs.

"What be you a-going to do with that 'ere bludgeon?" Mrs. Goodwin had inquired.

"All good and no harm," replied Mark, as he nodded good-bye.

Certainly it was not to support his steps he had taken it with him, for as he walked briskly on he performed most wonderful feats with it; whirling it round his head, bringing it down with tremendous force on some boulder of rock, milestone, or mound; and smashing imaginary foes in every direction. His exercise had made him quite warm, and he was all in a glow when he appeared before Mr. Neville.

"Why, Mark, I should have taken you for a wild Irishman, with a shillalagh, bound for the fair, instead of a steady English lad, going to church," said Mr. Neville, after Morning Service, and after Mark had eaten the dinner he had brought with him in the *kitchen of the priest's house*.

Mark looked no whit abashed.

"It's no Irishman as I am, sir, but English, as I hope, both blood and bones; and it's because I am that, that I've brought this here stick with me to-day."

"Why what can you be going to do with it?" inquired Mr. Neville.

"Well, sir," replied Mark, very solemnly, "when they as ought to do justice don't do that same, it follows that they must do it as can, and it's on that account and ne'er another that I've brought this here stick with me from Lowton."

"I don't quite understand how your stick is to aid in the administration of justice," said the Chaplain.

"You don't, sir! why wasn't two blackguards taken up for assaulting of you, and didn't they get off? and am not I, Mark Staunton, going to find them out before I turn my face home'ards, and ain't I going to thrash them both with this here stick till it'll be a mercy if there's a whole bone left in their bodies?"

To Mark's great surprise Mr. Neville threw himself back in his chair, and laughed heartily.

"Here, Davis," said he to the cook, who just then entered to clear away his luncheon, "take that stick from Mark Staunton, he's dangerous. He is thinking of mending one breach of the peace by making another. Mark, my man, surrender your arms to Davis, in return for which she shall give you a good supper before you go home; as for the stick, there is so much timber in it, it will make excellent firewood. Eh, Davis?"

Davis looked from her master to Mark, and back again, and Mark looked sheepishly at her. She laughed as she took the crabstick from his hand, and remarked that she would have it cloven, and "stacked" for their winter consumption.

"Where did that club come from?" asked Mary, entering the room.

"It is Mark's walking-cane," said her father.

"What a great horrid cumbersome thing," said Mary, as Davis carried it out of the room; "but, Mark, I have been looking for you, I thought you were in the kitchen. See, I have my books, I am quite ready for you." Mark touched his forehead and grinned. "Papa, has Mark told you that I have been talking to him about the confirmation which will be held at Lowton next spring, and that he says he should like to be confirmed then?"

No, Mark had not, but Mr. Neville was glad to hear it.

"So he and I have begun to prepare for it."

"Already! you have lost no time."

"You see, sir," said Mark, "Miss thought there'd be none too

much time after all, seeing as how I can't only come o' Sundays, and as how I don't know nothing about these here things, sir."

"I think you and she are very wise."

"But, papa," interrupted Mary, "he does know something about it already. Sit down, Mark, sit there," she pushed a chair towards him, "now tell papa what you already know about confirmation."

Mark sat down on the edge of the chair and dangled his hat between his knees, then he scratched his head, rubbed his hair up the wrong way, and finally answered his teacher's appeal by saying,

"Well, sir, what I understand from Miss Mary about confirmation is just this here,"—he paused, scratched his head again, and then proceeded, "when I was an unconscious babby, sir, my god-fathers and godmothers, which I take it must have been my natural born father and mother, for there's nobody else as I knows on as would have meddled with me when I was an infant," here he lost the thread of his exposition, and paused a moment to recover it. "When I was a babby, sir, they promised for me that when I was grown I should be an honest, upright, downright fellow, as would tell the truth and shame the devil, pay my debts, love my friend, hate my enemy, and keep out of the public-house."

"Oh, Mark," interposed Mary, scandalised, "I'm sure I never said anything about your hating your enemy."

"Didn't you, miss?" said Mark, stopping to think.

"Didn't you, Mary?" repeated Mr. Neville, mischievously.

"Papa! how can you! of course not."

"Well, she did not say that, Mark," said Mr. Neville aloud, "she only thought it," he whispered to his daughter. "Go on, Mark, what next?"

"Well, sir, all that same; leaving out, I suppose, about the enemy, which must have been my mistake."

"A great mistake indeed!" said Mary, pinching her father's arm.

"Well, sir, you see it was natural as my poor mother should wish me to be all that, and she tried for to bring me up to it conformably. But now I'm a man grown, it's a willy nilly sort of thing for me not to speak up for myself and say outright without fear or favour that I'm altogether of my mother's way of thinking. So I goes into the church with a lot of other young men similarly circumstanced, and the Bishop, he says to us, says he, Do you mean for to be God-fearing men? says he; and we says, We does."

Mary had risen, and now stood with her back to her pupil to hide the smile she tried in vain to check; but when he had ended she said gravely, "That is all quite right as far as it goes, is it not, papa? We are only at the beginnings at present."

quite right, and I think Mark will prove an apt pupil; thoroughly understands the obligation of declaring for which side he will be; on God's side or the Devil's." looked satisfied with Mr. Neville's approval, who rising, could now leave them to their lesson; and Mary, drawing to the table, and desiring Mark to do the same, announced, "en we are going to begin the Catechism regularly."

The first thing that was said after the Chaplain had closed behind him, had no reference whatever to the Catechism.

"Mary," said Mark, "that stick that Mrs. Davis took now, I brought it down on purpose for to serve out those at pitched into your reverend father the other day."

"Mark, indeed you must not; how shocking!" exclaimed the frightened. "Indeed you must promise me you will be of the kind. We must not return evil for evil, I thought that; we must not hate our enemies as you said just now, love them."

"them!" exclaimed Mark with intense scorn. "Do you tell me, Miss Mary, that you love these here 'Amalgamated Societies'?"

as a very awkward question, for Mary was conscious in of hearts that she did not at all. So she hesitated, and said, "What I do, or do not do, is no rule; I can't say I love very much at present, but I must try."

"repeated Mark, "be you really going to try to love Mr. Neville and this here blessed Mr. Bliss; and they two blackguards took up for assaulting of Mr. Neville, and them as were offy here on the heath? Why you'd be a-demeaning of, Miss Mary. I ask your pardon, though," he added with his forehead.

Mark was getting altogether beyond his mistress. "Mark," said she, "you must not talk to me about it, because you see I love you very much that my feelings are all wrong, I know about these people. Papa will talk to you about it. He is your person, and besides it is he who has been injured,

"That's just it, Miss Mary," replied the argumentative Mark, "not been injured, as they're not my enemies, for bless my soul, 's not one of them as has ever heard my name, I'm not bound to love them, and love them I neither can nor will." He hit his big fist on the table with a bang.

"I don't think you wouldn't hurt them," suggested his teacher. "I give me the chance," said Mark with a knowing wink. "I am used to having no grand moral pulpit within herself from

which she could consistently preach on the forgiveness of injuries done to her father, Mary thought the sooner they quitted this subject the better, and again announced that they would begin the Catechism regularly. But Mark was not ready.

"Miss Mary," said he, "would you be so kind as to explain to me what is a 'Protestant?'"

"Why the original Protestants were some Germans who lived three hundred years ago, and who signed a paper called a 'protestation,' which protested against certain errors and abuses which had at that time crept into the Roman Catholic Church, and so they were called Protesters or Protestants. But now-a-days, the word 'Protestant' simply means any one who without being a heathen or a Mahometan is yet not a Catholic."

"And what is a Catholic, Miss Mary?"

"A Catholic is one who believes in the ever Blessed Trinity; in the incarnation of our LORD JESUS CHRIST—(that means that He was made actual Man, and lived and suffered death here on earth yet without ceasing to be GOD;) and in the Sacraments."

Mark listened very attentively. "Is a Papist the same as a Catholic, Miss Mary?"

"No. A Papist only means a Catholic of the Western or Roman Church who acknowledges the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope as he is called, as the supreme head of the Church. The word Papist comes from Pope, and means one who upholds the Pope's supremacy, that is his headship over the whole Church. The Catholics of the Eastern or Greek Church, and the Catholics of the Anglican or English Church deny that the Bishop of Rome, or Pope, is supreme or chief over the whole Church, and so they are not Papists."

"Then are there three Churches, Miss Mary?"

"All Catholics belong to the one, true, holy and Catholic Church which we speak of in the belief. 'I believe in the holy Catholic Church,' or as it is expressed in the longer Creed we say in the Communion Service, 'I believe one Catholic, and Apostolic Church,' but the Church is just now divided into three branches, the Roman Catholic, the Greek Catholic, and the Anglo-Catholic. The Roman Catholics will have nothing to do with the Greek Catholics or with us, because we will not admit the supremacy of the Pope. But though at present there are heart-burnings and quarrellings between these three branches they cannot cease to be Catholic any more than three brothers can cease to be brothers, however much they may hate each other, or even if one should turn the others out of doors. The churches of different countries may *differ in their manners and customs; their prayers and hymns may*

not be quite the same; or the dresses of their Priests, or their ceremonies in the Church services; but as long as they have the Catholic faith, and Catholic government, they are Catholic and therefore of the one true Church.

"You see, Mark," she continued, "a body of persons holding the same faith is not necessarily 'a Church,' unless its faith and government are Catholic—and we can always tell whether such bodies of persons are Catholic by the following rules :—They must believe in the ever Blessed Trinity, that is, the Three Persons in One GOD :—in the incarnation of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that is, that He was born of the pure and blessed Virgin Mary, was made Man, was crucified, died, was buried, rose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven, that He is perfect Man and also perfect GOD :—in the Sacraments, as the means of our union with our LORD JESUS CHRIST :—and in the Communion of Saints, that is, that the happy dead are as much a part of the Church as we are, that they join their prayers and praises with ours, that part of the Church is in Heaven, and part on earth, but all one. And besides this right faith there must be right government, that is, the Church must be governed by Bishops who have received their commission direct from the Apostles."

"How is that, Miss Mary?"

"The power and authority of the Apostles were given to them by our Blessed LORD Himself, just before He ascended into Heaven. They in their turn gave power and authority to the other Bishops who succeeded them, and these again to others, and so down and down to this very day. Now the Roman, the Greek, and the Anglican Churches are all governed in this way; they can all trace the descent of their Bishops from the Apostles; and they all three believe in the Blessed Trinity, in the Incarnation, in the Sacraments, and the Communion of Saints. Therefore they are equally Catholic or true, even though one or other of them may believe other things which are not true, or disbelieve some things which are, and quarrel and wrangle with each other about these things. Do you understand, Mark?"

Mark did not answer immediately. He seemed particularly anxious to understand this matter, and to be pondering it profoundly in his mind. Presently he said without answering her question, "What I want particular for to know, is, whether *I* be a Protestant."

"Of course not," said Mary.

"No?" said Mark, unknitting his brows, and looking up hopefully.

"Why, how can you be?" said Mary. "In the first place you are a Catholic by Baptism. You were baptised by a Priest of the

English Church, which is truly Catholic by all the rules I told you of; and then you have not been untrue to the Church by any wilful misbelief in her doctrines. You believe in the ever Blessed Trinity, GOD the FATHER, GOD the SON, and GOD the HOLY GHOST, do you not, Mark?"

"That I do," said Mark reverently.

"And you believe that the second Blessed Person was made Man, and died for our sins, and yet is perfect GOD?"

"I do indeed, Miss Mary."

"And you believe that your baptism has made GOD your FATHER, that you are one of the great Christian Family, and that Heaven is the Home for which you must fit yourself?"

"I do, Miss Mary."

"And you believe that after you have received confirmation and are allowed to become a Communicant, every time you go honestly and humbly to Holy Communion you will receive fresh grace and strength against sin, the world, and the devil?"

"I do believe it."

"You believe that the Presence of the LORD JESUS CHRIST is in that Divine Sacrament? that His Body and His Blood are 'verily and indeed,' as the Catechism says, taken and received in it?"

"I do, Miss Mary."

"And you believe that the happy dead are still one with us, that when we pray, they pray with us, when we praise, they praise with us?"

"That I do," said Mark heartily, thinking of his mother.

"Then, Mark, by all these signs you are a Catholic."

He clapped his hand upon his thigh, exclaiming in a tone of exultation, "Now, Miss Mary, I'm as pleased as if I'd found a tenpenny note. Mrs. Dean (our parson's wife) she says to me, 'How ever can you hobnob with they Catholics when you're a natural born Protestant?' she says. And I says, not knowing what a Protestant might be, nor what a Catholic might be, more than I knew she called herself a Protestant, and you a Catholic, 'Ma'am,' I says, 'if I was born a Protestant it's my misfortune, ma'am, and not my fault.'"

Mary laughed. "Well, you see, Mark, she was right so far; you were born a Protestant, it was your baptism made you a Catholic, because that admitted you into the body of the true Church."

"But, Miss Mary, how about our Parson? He ain't a Catholic surely; for I know he don't think no more of the Sacraments than *that book*."

"He may be untrue to his faith, Mark, but he cannot help being a Catholic Priest, because he has been ordained such by a Catholic Bishop, one who had his commission in a direct line from the Apostles."

"But, Miss Mary, I shouldn't like to receive the Communion from he."

"He cannot injure the Sacraments, Mark, by his own want of faith in them. They come direct from GOD. He is only GOD's instrument. He has no more to do with them than the pen you write with has to do with the letter you write. You use it to write with, but the letter is yours. Or I'll give you a better instance. I often write papa's letters for him. He tells me what to write, and I write it. Still the letter is not mine, it is papa's. Now suppose he bade me write you a letter full of good advice, and I didn't agree with it, or believe one word of it, and yet wrote it because I could not help it, the letter would be just as valuable to you, would it not, as if I had agreed to every word of it?"

"I think I understand that 'ere," said Mark. "But, Miss Mary, there's another thing I want you for to explain to me. Mrs. Dean, she says, speaking of all them up at St. Mary's, 'they're ojus Puseyites,' says she. Now Miss Mary, what is a Puseyite?"

Mary laughed heartily. "Why, there is a very holy Priest of our dear English Church, who happens to have the very ugly name of 'Pusey'—for it is ugly, isn't it? Well, he has preached a great deal, and written a great deal, to try and wake people up to an understanding of their great privileges as members of the Holy Catholic Church, and so now every one that cares about his Baptism, and prizes Holy Communion, and loves the Church, and wishes to do his duty heartily to GOD in it, and above all, feels that he can never do enough, or give enough of his very best for the Glory of GOD, and who tries to make the House of GOD beautiful, and the Service of GOD a Service worthy of the King of kings, is called a 'Puseyite.' The name is given because it sounds ugly, and to make Dr. Pusey—and all who are as much in earnest in the Service of the Church as he is—ridiculous."

"I don't care a brass farthing for that," said Mark. "If that's a 'Puseyite,' I'm content to be one."

"There now," said Mary, "there's the bell for evensong, and no Catechism have we done."

"We'll do a double lot next Sunday, ma'am, by your favour," said Mark. "You've taken quite a load off my mind, Miss Mary. They call after me in the streets sometimes, 'Catholic, Catholic;' not as I cared for that, though I didn't know what it meant; but

it altogether confusticated me to think I was a natural-born Protestant and couldn't help myself."

Mark returned to Lowton without his crab-stick, and the "Amalgamated Protestants" remained uncorrected.

CHAPTER XXIX.

VOCATIONS.

GRADUALLY the troubled waters of Kirkminsterian "Protestantism" subsided, but leaving, like all floods, a good deal of slime and slush behind them. The windows of the Mission House were mended once more, and the little Colony from St. Mary's that inhabited it, ventured again on their missions of mercy amongst the sick and needy. For some weeks they had scarcely dared show themselves in the streets for fear of insult or worse.

By Christmas everything was pretty quiet. More flowers and fruit had been sent from Highfield, Mary Neville had paid her visit there, winning all hearts except Miss Wrigley's, and disarming even the young Elsworths' tutor, who was correspondent and part proprietor of a "religious" newspaper called the "Protestant Alarm." The two eldest Miss Elsworths had drunk tea with her in return, been all over the Home, learnt all the children's names, and promised them plenty of raisins and brandy for a Christmas snap-dragon. Mrs. Elsworthy had called on Mrs. Neville, had also inspected the Home, and had sent down a quantity of old linen for the hospitals.

On Christmas Eve Mr. Neville announced to his wife that he had invited Mark to eat his Christmas dinner with their servants. "There will be Davis' brother to keep him company, and I will ask Sister Mabel to let that little thing Lydia dine here too."

Mrs. Neville had no objection to Lydia; "But, my dear," said she to her husband, "this young man Staunton comes here now every Sunday, and though he brings his own dinner with him he always eats it in the kitchen."

"What then?"

"What then! why there is Emma, and she is a very nice looking girl."

"Well?"

"My dear John, don't you see, young Staunton and she will be *falling in love*."

"And why shouldn't they?"

"Why, then this Staunton will perhaps be wanting to marry her."

"And why shouldn't he? Mark, I know, is a very good fellow, and I thought Emma was a very good girl; do you know anything against her?"

"Oh, no, certainly not, she is a very good girl indeed."

"Then why should not Mark marry her if he and she should wish it?"

On reflection Mrs. Neville did not know any reason why he should not, but she implied she should be sorry to lose Emma's services; also she seemed to think that it was improper to make love in a kitchen.

"But you and I have made love in our day, Katy, why should not Mark and Emma? But perhaps the kitchen makes the impropriety."

Mrs. Neville laughed. "Only think of your turning match-maker," said she, "why, you will be wanting to find a husband for Davis next."

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Davis entered. Mrs. Neville looked foolish, and Mr. Neville remarked, "Davis, your mistress seems to think I ought to find you a husband, but you see I can't make up my mind to part with you."

Mrs. Neville exclaimed. Davis curtsey'd, and smiling demurely replied, that "she wouldn't marry, not she, no, not if the man as asked her was made of molten gold."

"I should think not, indeed," said her master; "what a heavy fellow he'd be! But Davis, young Staunton will dine here to-morrow, and his little sister, and do you be sure to—"

Here Mrs. Neville, having no confidence in her husband's discretion, and thinking something was coming about Emma and Mark, was seized with a remarkable fit of coughing. Mr. Neville paused, laughed, and ended his sentence thus, "Be sure to make an extra-sized plum pudding."

"As if it wasn't already made!" ejaculated Davis, holding up her hands in wonder at her master's ignorance.

The Superiors of St. Mary's Orphanage were keenly alive to the great difficulty to be encountered in the management of a number of children cut off from all ordinary family ties—a difficulty which all those must realise who give themselves heart and soul to orphanage work—namely, that of preventing the children falling into a sort of lazy indifference, a selfish content, and an absence of all honourable ambition. To children in an orphanage food and clothing come as matters of course; there has been no anxiety as to how

they are to be procured—at least the children have felt none. A bell rings, and there is a plentiful meal; clothes are reported past mending, and straightway new ones appear in their stead. Their interests are bounded by the four walls of the orphanage, and when they pass beyond them the chances are that they are quite unfitted to “rough it” in the world.

To remedy this foreseen evil the Superiors of St. Mary's kept two objects in view. First, to initiate the children as much as possible into the cares of the orphanage; i.e., into the mysteries of supplying food, clothing, &c.; and secondly, to keep up, as much as possible, such family ties as were still unbroken.

For the attainment of the first, all housekeeping matters, &c., were invariably discussed before the children. Some of them always accompanied the “shopping” Sisters on their expeditions, and heard all the calculations and bargainings that went on about their clothes. They knew what their things cost; they were taught to be careful and saving of what they had. They made everything they wore with their own hands; and such girls as were told off for kitchen work, took it in turns to assist in the preparation of their own meals, and so knew something of the art of economising provisions. Ever since Sister Mabel had been in office she had aimed at making the children feel a personal interest in the home that sheltered them. The work they did for sale was all entered in an orphanage book, and they knew the value of their work, and so experienced the pleasure of feeling they did something to earn the food they ate, and clothes they wore. Sister Mabel not only kept her accounts very carefully and openly at the orphanage, but made her elder girls assist in keeping them, so that they were fully up to the mysteries of pounds, shillings, and pence.

Secondly, the Superiors, and especially Mr. Neville, were most anxious to keep up unbroken ties where possible, and in cases where they did not exist, to create new ones. They particularly dreaded all isolation of the orphans, as tending to deaden their affections; they felt the disadvantage of there being no regular holidays, and sought to obviate this as much as possible by contriving that the children should now and then, when feasible, spend a few days among their kinsfolk and friends. Where no kinsfolk or friends existed, the Sisters sought, by the affectionate personal interest which they took in all that concerned their little charges, to awaken home feelings and home affections in them towards themselves. For this end, they had made it a rule of their establishment that never more than forty children should ever be gathered in one orphanage under one head; and never more than twenty in the junior, or St. Joseph's orphanage. Should funds and opportunities place it within

their power to relieve a greater number of orphans, it was enacted, that branch orphanages should be erected under different heads. "A woman cannot be a true mother to more than forty children at once," Mr. Neville had observed; and to be a "true mother" to her little flock was Sister Mabel's earnest endeavour. To enable her to be so more perfectly, the little children under seven had been separated and gathered together under Sister Fanny in a home of their own. "These little creatures," said the Chaplain, "require altogether different training and discipline. What is good for an elder girl who can reason, would be very bad for a baby that cannot, and *vice versa*. Besides," he remarked to Sister Mabel, "if you gave yourself up to the babies as you ought, you would have no leisure to be the friend and confidante of their elders."

In furtherance of these views, when Christmas came round, the children of St. Mary's always took a full share in all Christmas arrangements and expenditures, for was not the orphanage their home? and if a near relation asked leave for an orphan to spend Christmas Day amongst relations, the opportunity was always gladly accepted. Hence Mr. Neville's desire that Lydia should eat her Christmas dinner with her brother.

Only three other girls this Christmas had an opportunity of "outing" as they called it. Martha was to spend the day with her "lady," Charlotte with her mother, and Miriam was to accompany her mother and sister to their home after Morning Service for a whole week's holiday. The "friendless ones," as they very contentedly called themselves, prepared to enjoy their Christmas and entertain their small neighbours from St. Joseph's (who always spent it with them) in their own way, and the whole of Christmas Eve was a long, joyous bustle. There was so much to be done, both for St. Mary's and St. Joseph's, that when the clock struck the hour before bedtime, only about a dozen children had finished their work and gathered round the schoolroom fire to admire their decorations, and talk over the anticipated delights of the morrow. Lydia was still absent. She was assisting the "wardrobe girls" in putting out the holiday garments, and her exceeding delight at the prospect of her dinner with Mark had so elated her that she forgot everything, and what she did one moment she undid the next, partly to the annoyance and partly the amusement of those she was supposed to be helping.

Sister Mabel, having finished all her Eve labours, had retired to her own room for rest and quietness, when she was very soon disturbed by a knock at the door. It was Rose, all in a glow from work, soap, and satisfaction.

"If you please, Sister, Miss Mary has brought us in a bag of

chesnuts; such beauties! And it wants an hour to bedtime, and we have done all our work,—at least, some of us—and so we want to know if we may roast and eat them."

"But then those who have not done will not have any."

"Oh, we will save their shares, Sister, though it would not signify if we did eat all these, for Miss Mary says they have come from Mr. Elsworth's, and there are loads and loads more."

"Loads more! I hope Miss Mary does not think I am going to let you eat 'loads and loads' of chesnuts."

Rose laughed. "But these, Sister?"

"Ah, well these."

"Thank you, Sister, and may we have some salt? Chesnuts are nothing without salt."

"My dear, I do not keep the salt; you must ask Sister Rachel."

"She is so busy, Sister; may the refectory girls get it?"

"Very well."

"And Sister—"

"What, something more? what a conscience you have, Rose! are not chesnuts and salt enough for an Eve supper?"

"No," laughed Rose, "we want you too, dear Sister. We have got the armchair up to the fire, and we want you to come and sit there, and smell the chesnuts if you won't eat them. We are so cosy you can't think. Ah, do think, dear Sister; Christmas Eve only comes but once a year, and we shall very soon be going to bed, and then you will have yards and yards of quiet time till the bell rings for midnight service."

"'Loads and loads of chesnuts;' 'yards and yards of time!'" repeated Sister Mabel. "Will you remind me, when school begins again, to give you a lesson on the use and abuse of metaphors?"

"I have not the remotest idea what those may be, Sister, but I will be sure to remind you," was Rose's reply. "And you will come, dear Sister?"

"Well, I think I must, if only to watch over the interests of the Queen's English."

"Thank you, dear Sister!" and away ran Rose. The salt and a pan were produced, and the roasting of the chesnuts began, but Sister Mabel did not immediately appear.

"Where can she be?" said Miriam.

"Still in her room," said Charlotte. "Carrie has just come back from the Mother House, and I saw her go in there."

"I hope she won't keep Sister long," observed Rose.

"I wonder what answer she has brought," said Miriam.

"What did she go about?" asked Harriet.

"Why, don't you know?" said Rose. "Carrie had written to

the Mother to tell her how greatly she desired to be a Lay Sister, and the Mother sent for her this evening to question her about her vocation before she could give her an answer."

"Her vocation! now I should so like to know exactly what that means," said Charlotte. "Mr. Neville said on the 8th that 'vocation' meant the Call of God. But that can hardly be, or else it must have two meanings, for yesterday when those socks came in from St. Joseph's to be mended, Sister Rachel threw them to Lydia and said, 'You shall mend these, for darning seems your special vocation.' That would seem to mean something one does best."

"Or *likes* best," observed Rose, "for when I told Sister Mabel how I disliked being 'kitchen girl,' she said, 'I think housework seems your vocation.' She meant what I liked best."

"Oh, here's Sister Mabel and Carrie," cried the chesnut-roasters in chorus, and then Miriam said smilingly, "Well, Carrie, what was the answer? may we know?"

There was a slight flush on Carrie's cheek, and a look of quiet happiness in her blue eyes. As Sister Mabel settled herself in the arm-chair the children had brought for her, Carrie sat down on the floor, nestling herself against her, and replied, "The Mother said I was very young, but that she had no objection to my becoming a probationer. I could not be a professed Sister till I was twenty-one, she said, as it would be against the rules, but I might enter on my probation on the Feast of the Circumcision and try my vocation."

"And try your vocation? Ah, now we'll ask Sister Mabel," said Miriam. "Sister, do explain to us exactly what vocation means;" and Miriam repeated what had already passed amongst them on the subject; concluding with, "Is it work we can do best—or like best—or what is it?"

Whilst Miriam was speaking, the other girls who had finished their labours came dropping in one by one, with clean, rosy faces, and very smooth hair, pulling down their sleeves as they entered, one and all exclaiming, as they severally made their appearance, "Well, I've done," or, as some expressed it, "I'm done," to which the chesnut-roasters responded, "Then, if you've done," or, "you're done," as the case might be, "here are some chesnuts for you. Sit down and eat them, and hold your tongue, for Sister Mabel is going to explain something to us."

Then, when the chesnuts were distributed, Sister Mabel tried to explain to them the meaning of "vocations." "A vocation," said she, "does literally—that is, actually—mean the Call of God, as Mr. Neville said on the 8th. That is its high religious meaning. But then the word 'vocation' is often used in common talk merely

to express the work we do best, or towards which we seem most inclined. Still I should not call roasting chesnuts a vocation."

The girls laughed.

"To speak seriously, vocation is the special work marked out for us by GOD, that which He has fitted us to do, and which He gives us the opportunity to do. Each of you children have a vocation—a work to do for GOD in the world, the end of which will be His Glory and your own salvation. If Carrie begins her probation on the Feast of the Circumcision, and perseveres in that and her novitiate till she is twenty-one, we may be pretty certain that, as she has so great a desire for a Sister's life, and the power and opportunity of following it, that it is the vocation marked out for her."

"Sister," said Carrie, raising herself so as to look into Sister Mabel's face, and speaking with great earnestness, "I shall not go back, I shall persevere. I will wait any time, I do not care how long the probation may be; I will wait years, if need be; I am quite sure this is my vocation."

"No, my love, you cannot be sure, nor can we be sure," replied Sister Mabel; "GOD might have other designs for you,—it is not always that which we desire most which is our true vocation."

"Oh, Sister!"

"I will give you an example. There was once a very holy woman, whose name was Mademoiselle De Lamouroux; she had, like you, an exceeding desire to be a Sister; but her Confessor told her she had no vocation. This greatly surprised her, her desire being so strong, and she seemed so remarkably fitted for that sort of life, that she was much grieved and distressed by his decision, nevertheless, she yielded to his counsels, and gave up her intention. Many years afterwards she was asked to undertake, only for a time, the care of some poor penitents, women who having lived very sinful lives, wished to amend, and live religiously for the future. She consented, but she disliked the work exceedingly. These poor women, though in earnest, were very disagreeable people to be with, they had coarse vulgar manners, and said and did things which were peculiarly distasteful to a refined high-bred lady; but she persevered to please the friend for whom she had undertaken the work, and little by little, first one circumstance and then another caused her to continue at her post, and at last it ended in her becoming the Superior of a regular establishment for these poor creatures, and winning numbers of otherwise lost souls for CHRIST. And there she remained till her death, which took place when she was very old indeed, upwards of eighty. This then was her vocation, or the *path* GOD had marked out for her; this was the work she had to do for Him in the world. Not what she herself had chosen, you

will observe, not what she liked best, but something at first altogether disagreeable to her, and which came to her, as one might say, by accident."

"But, Sister, how can people then find out their vocation?" asked Miriam.

"By always doing their very best in their immediate and present circumstances. 'Doing their duty,' as the Catechism says, 'in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call them.' Then He opens out to them gradually the path He means them to pursue. Now all you children here ought to be preparing for your special vocations. You do not know now what they may be, but if you are learning all you can, and doing your very best, you will be fit for the vocation, whatever it may be, which will at length be opened out to you. You must remember, dears, that this orphanage is only your training place, you must fit yourselves here for future work in the world without."

"But, Sister, is it not wrong to form plans of what we will do when we are grown up?" asked Miriam, remembering the day-dreams she had once confided to Sister Mabel.

"No, my dear, not at all, provided they aim not at our own gratification but at God's glory. I should wish each one of you to have some little plan of life before you, to have a purpose in all you do. For instance, it would seem that your vocation has been pretty well marked out for you already."

"How so, Sister?" asked Charlotte.

"Why, Miriam's mother has set her heart on her being a schoolmistress, Miriam herself wishes it, she has a taste and capabilities for it, and all the circumstances of her life seem to make her path plain to her. We may, therefore, I think, be pretty sure that Miriam's vocation is to be a schoolmistress."

Miriam looked exceedingly pleased.

"But about my vocation, Sister dear?" asked Carrie anxiously. "Is it not as certain as Miriam's? I wish to be a Sister most earnestly,—I have wished it for a very long time, for three years at least; and you do not disapprove, nor the Mother, nor Mr. Neville, and do not the circumstances of my life make my path plain to me?"

Sister Mabel stroked the girl's fair hair. "As far as we can see, my love, I think it is certain."

Carrie heaved a sigh of satisfaction, and laid her head down again on the Sister's knee.

"I wonder what my vocation will be?" said Charlotte.

"One part of it is certain," replied the Sister, "and that is, that when you leave here you must do all you can to lighten your mother's burden."

"That I will," said Charlotte emphatically.

"I know what my vocation is," said Lydia with a little laugh, confidentially to the fire. She had slipped in in time to hear Sister Mabel's definition of vocations.

"What is it, pray?" asked Miriam laughing.

"Why," replied Lydia, with a look of delight, "when I know everything, I'm going to live with Mark, and keep his house, (we'll have such a nice little cottage,) and do everything for him."

A shout of laughter followed this announcement, and Sister Mabel remarked, "'When you know everything!' poor Mark, he will have to wait long for a housekeeper."

"Ah, Sister, you know what I mean," replied the little girl, joining heartily in the laugh that was against her.

"But, Lydia," said Miriam, who was always disposed to be argumentative, "suppose Mark marries, he won't want you then."

Lydia passed in an instant from laughter to indignation. "Oh, he will never marry," she exclaimed, "he would never do anything so unkind."

"Stay, stay, my dear," interrupted Sister Mabel, "I cannot see how that would be unkind of Mark. I think it is very likely indeed that he will marry,—that it will be his 'vocation,' and a very nice vocation for him too. And in that case you will be a gainer, not a loser, for you would have a sister as well as a brother, and perhaps little nephews and nieces who would love Aunt Lydia dearly, and whom you would, I know, love dearly too; and your vocation would certainly be to prove yourself the kindest and most helpful of sisters, and the most loving of aunts."

"There, Lydia," exclaimed several of her companions.

The nephews and nieces sounded pleasant, certainly, but still she did not look altogether satisfied.

"We should be careful never to let our affections become selfish," said the Sister, observing her; "that is a worthless love which would hinder another from enjoying a happiness which we cannot altogether share. If it would make Mark happier, (as I do not doubt it would,) to have a little home to himself, and an affectionate wife and dear little children, it would be a poor return for all his care and love for you if you grudged him that happiness, Lydia."

The little girl looked down abashed. "I would not, Sister dear. I would like him to be happy—indeed I would—only—" Here she broke down, and almost came to tears.

"*Only* you want him to be happy *only* in your way. We are all too apt to do that; and that is selfish, it is not true love. But, dear child, there is nothing to cry about. Who would think of

crying on Christmas Eve, and with such a treat as you have in prospect for to-morrow!"

Lydia wiped her eyes and tried to laugh, and Rose handed her a chesnut in the tongs by way of comfort. Then helping herself, she observed, "We all seem to be making up our minds as to what we shall be when we leave here; it sounds ungrateful—as if we wanted to get away,—Carrie is the only one who thinks it her vocation to stop where she is."

This new idea made the children look grave, but Sister Mabel laughed. "When little birds are fledged they leave the nest," said she, "if they all remained no nest would hold them."

"Then it is not ungrateful, unloving, Sister?" asked Charlotte, anxiously, for she dearly loved St. Mary's, and yet felt a strong desire to buffet the waves of the outer world some day.

"Certainly not; and moreover, as I said just now, I wish all of you would form some definite purpose of what you would like to be when your training time is over. Remember, dears, we have been training you for this very purpose, that you shall one day play a good part, do a good day's work, approve yourselves good soldiers of JESUS CHRIST, true children of Blessed Mary, in the world in which GOD has placed you. As men choose trades and professions and then study to fit themselves for their choice, so I wish you girls would have some idea of how you are going to earn your own living when you are able to do so. It would help you so with your work here,—for instance, if Lydia looks forward to being some day a proud little aunt, she will learn to cut out and make frocks as quickly and neatly as Sister Ruth."

At this suggestion, a Babel of voices arose, every one had some choice to make as to their future calling.

"I mean to be a nurse, I always said so," declared Charlotte, "I'm always so glad when I'm told off as one of the St. Joseph girls; I do love little children so."

"I mean to be a laundry-maid," said Mary Anne; "ever since we have got up our own aprons, and caps, and collars, and pocket-handkerchiefs, I have made up my mind there is nothing I like so well as washing and ironing."

"I mean to be housekeeper in a gentleman's family," said Harriet.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Rose, "when you leave here I suppose you'll be about sixteen or so; that's the age at which housekeepers are always chosen, is it not, Sister?"

"I am afraid, Harriet," replied Sister Mabel, smiling, "that if you want to get to the top of a staircase you must begin with the lowest stair."

"And that will be as scullery-girl," said Miriam, "washing dishes, and doing all the cook's dirty work. How would you like that?"

"I shouldn't mind it a bit," said Harriet stoutly. "There's no harm in wishing to get to the top of the staircase at last, is there, Sister?"

"None at all, my dear, as long as you go up quietly and fairly, one step at a time. People who try to get up three steps at a time are apt to trip themselves up and break their shins, and those who climb up the banisters outside, may lose their balance, and actually break their necks."

The children laughed.

"What do you mean, Sister?" asked Harriet.

"I mean that base and mean, deceitful, dishonest, and impatient attempts to 'get on in the world,' as it is called, are not only dangerous, like foolish ways of getting up stairs, but are *certain* to cause us severe injury, if not total destruction,—and that not of our bodies, but of our souls. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'"

"But, Sister, suppose one got on fairly?"

"In that case you would be only following your vocation, and doing your duty in that state of life to which GOD calls you; and it might please Him to keep on calling you higher and higher, till at last, like Joseph, you become ruler over your fellow-servants, and over your master's house. But, dear children, the secret of Joseph's success was that everything he did, he did it unto GOD and not unto man. His work was perfect because it was all performed under the eye of a Master in Whose presence he always dwelt, and never forgot."

"He was always 'recollected,' eh, Sister?" observed Charlotte.

"Yes; and the little scullery-girl who thinks some day to be that very responsible person a *housekeeper*,—one who keeps and guards her master's house and goods, must wash her dishes with some higher motive than merely to keep in the cook's good graces, and must be content, like Joseph, to forfeit confidence and place and character, rather than 'do wickedness and sin against GOD.'"

"But if I lost confidence and character, Sister, how could I ever rise?" asked Harriet, taking this admonition entirely to herself.

"Did not Joseph rise?" returned the Sister. "'Who ever trusted in the LORD and was confounded?' Our Heavenly FATHER will take much better care of our characters, if we quietly leave them with Him at His bidding, than we can possibly take of them *ourselves*. If sometimes He lets His children pass under a cloud,

it is but to try them, to bring out their powers, their highest qualities, to overcome troublesome besetting faults may be, and to fit them for rising higher when His time comes to raise them."

"One reason I want so much to be a nurse," said Charlotte, "is because of something Sister Ruth said one day."

"What might that be?" asked Sister Mabel.

"Sister, she was telling us about the little children she used to nurse when she was in service, and how much more she had to do with them than their own mother. They used to be always with her, except when they went down just now and then into the drawing-room. And she said she used to fancy whenever she took them out of their little beds in the morning, and knelt down with them whilst they said their little prayers, that it was said to her soul, 'Take this child and nurse it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages.' And she used to tell them stories out of the Bible, and sing hymns to them, and she used to pray with them and for them; and she said she would never have left them, she loved them so, and she wanted so to see them grow up holy men and women, only Mr. Dillon wanted her so to be his wife. But what made me most wish to be a nurse was her saying that one of the little boys' names was 'Gregory,' and she used to wonder whether when he grew up he would be a second Gregory the Great; and then she said, 'Who knows but what St. Gregory's first lessons of holiness might have been learned from his nurse;' and she said, 'Only think what a glorious thing it would have been to have nursed a saint.'"

"Sister Ruth was right," replied Sister Mabel, "in her feeling of the extreme responsibility of a nurse—and a housekeeper," here she smiled at Harriet, "has great powers of good and evil in her dealings with her fellow-servants, she may be their greatest help and blessing, or their greatest enemy and misfortune. The worldly housekeeper will only be thinking how she can make most money out of her situation, without any regard to her master's interest, or the welfare of the servants under her; the Christian housekeeper on the contrary, will, like holy Joseph, study her master's interests before her own, and will be as a mother or elder sister to all her fellow-servants; and there is no telling the great help she may be to them in teaching the ignorant, strengthening those who are easily tempted, and establishing those who should happen to be well-principled. When Harriet goes out to service, and sees, as somehow or other she must see, the terrible evils which brood secretly in outwardly respectable households, she will then understand the power for good or evil which is possessed by upper servants."

Harriet looked grave and rather frightened at this, but Sister Mabel continued,

"What, however, shall we say of the nurse? An evil, irreligious nurse is a murderess of the little souls committed to her; the Christian nurse is their guardian angel. In the upper ranks of society it is as Sister Ruth told you,—the children are much more with their nurse than with their mother. The nurse has the power then of sowing in their young hearts the seeds of everything that is base and mean and vile, or lessons of holiness they will never afterwards forget; the children will be moulded chiefly by her example. The Christian nurse will, like Sister Ruth, nurse her babies only for the LORD, looking to Him for her true wages. And supposing one of those babies afterwards became a great and noble statesman, and that he could say—my first lessons of patriotism, honour, and true nobility were learnt from my nurse. Would not such a declaration be noble wages? or suppose he became a great judge, or general, or writer, and that all his influence was for good,—all his work for that which was high and noble, and that he could point to his nurse and say, 'I am but practising the lessons I learnt in my nursery;' or suppose he became such a Bishop as Ambrose, or Gregory, a Prince of God, and that he could declare, 'She who first sowed in my heart a thirst for God's glory was my *nurse*;' would not such wages be almost overwhelming in their exceeding blessedness?"

"Oh, Sister, yes!" exclaimed several of the children.

"And suppose such a nurse at the last Great Day, standing before the throne, and saying, 'Behold me and the children whom Thou hast given me,'—what wages could ever equal such words as would then be addressed to her, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy LORD?'"

Charlotte threw her chesnuts out of her lap, and came and stood close by the Sister.

"Sister," said she, with sparkling eyes, "I will be such a nurse as that."

"And I," "And I," cried several other children.

"Say rather you will pray to be such, and aim at being such. If you children do but seek now to realise that you have every one of you been sent into the world to do some definite work for the glory of God, I shall have no fears for you when you are thrown on your own resources. Such work may be done amid much sorrow, much opposition, much suffering, as Joseph's was, but the wages of such work will be eventually, if only you have patience, riches that can never fail or perish, a happiness so intense that nothing can ever mar it, treasure stored up in the heavenly mansions, the pleasures that dwell at God's right hand."

Sister Mabel had been speaking with the quiet enthusiasm pecu-

liar to her, and which thrilled the hearts of the happy sanguine children before her. It was part of her plan of teaching not to conceal evil from her pupils,—not to let them go forth in ignorance of evil into an unknown world, there to meet it as a previously unheard of stranger, and very likely fall a prey to it at the very first encounter,—“forewarned, forearmed,” was a principle on which she always worked. She told her children plainly of the world’s evils, of its temptations, of its sorrows, its disappointments, and, as she had just been doing, of its opportunities for noble deeds, and the true prizes that might be won in conflict with it. It was her desire that her children should deliberately choose the good and reject the evil; that they should as deliberately count the cost of Christian warfare, and then with determined will and purpose enrol themselves for ever on the LORD’s side.

To all she had now said, Carrie had listened, rejoicing that there was no need for her to go out and buffet the world’s waves, that there was abundance of work for her to do without quitting her beloved Home. There was something of indolence and moral cowardice, perhaps, in her feelings, but she was not aware of this. How great is the mercy which conceals the future from us; how little could we bear to look forward to evil days.

Carrie had not spoken since she had last addressed herself to Sister Mabel, but now turning to Rose, she said suddenly,

“What do you mean to be then, Rose?”

“Who, I? oh, I made up my mind last 8th. I mean to be a lady’s-maid; and I mean my lady to have a spine complaint, and to be obliged always to lie flat on a sofa, quite helpless.”

“Dear me!” said Carrie.

“How shocking!” said Lydia.

“How cruel!” said Sister Mabel.

“Why ‘cruel,’ Sister?” asked Rose, whilst her companions laughed heartily.

“Surely you are cruel to afflict your poor lady so.”

Rose laughed as merrily as the rest.

“It’s all Mrs. Neville’s fault then, Sister; she came up to me on the 8th to say how glad she was I had won a prize for good reading; and she said, ‘if ever you have to wait on an invalid, you will find this a most valuable accomplishment. So few people can read well enough to give pleasure to the sick.’ So I thought I would look out for a sick lady.”

“But why should she be quite helpless?” asked Charlotte.

“Because I should like to be absolutely necessary to some one. I should like to know that some one couldn’t do without me.”

“I’m sure that must be selfish,” remarked Miriam.

Is it, Sister?" asked Rose.

"I think so," replied the Sister. "It is a feeling which I fear would lead to jealousies, envyings, and such evil feelings, and it would shut out all high and noble motives, all desire of serving God for His glory."

Rose looked grave.

"What do you mean to be, Sanna?" asked Harriet of the little girl.

"Oh, I mean to learn all I can here, and then when father comes back to England, I shall do just what he likes; I don't care what it may be as long as it pleases him."

Sister Mabel patted the child's pale cheek.

"A very good choice, my darling. We had better all follow your example; do our very best here, and leave our future to our FATHER."

"But we have not all got fathers, Sister," said Rose.

"Indeed! what do we mean then when we say, 'Our FATHER?'"

"Oh, I was stupid," said Rose, blushing.

Just then Carrie raised herself from her reclining attitude; and giving the Sister a tender respectful kiss went off to ring the bell for prayers.

"Only a fortnight more," thought she, "and my place, my work will be fixed for life. What happiness!"

Sister Ruth passing from the oratory stopped to wish her good night.

"Well you have your wish at last," said she, smiling; "are you happy now, Carrie?"

"Almost too happy, if that can be," replied the young monitor.

"Pray that I may be faithful to my vocation, Sister, and duly thankful for it. I feel as if I could not be thankful enough. My heavens are all blue, Sister, a deep summer blue, there is not one single cloud in them."

And yet at that instant there was rising in her horizon the wind and rain that were to darken her whole life, though the cloud was as yet no bigger "than a man's hand."

CHAPTER XXX.

CARRIE'S OFFERING.

HAPPY Christmas! Happy indeed to Lydia Lee. In after years how often did that Christmas Day rise up before her as a day to be remembered, a red letter day indeed in her young

life. We need not tell in what a flutter of joyous excitements she passed that Christmas morning, or how after service she darted into her brother's arms the moment she had passed the chapel door; or dwell on her enjoyment of that wonderful and novel event a Christmas dinner, and Christmas pudding, eaten by Mark's side in the Chaplain's hospitable kitchen; or how she was petted and made much of by Mrs. Davis and Emma, and kindly greeted by Mrs. and Miss Neville, and even by Mr. Neville himself; or on the quiet afternoon ramble with Mark over the common, and cozy tea afterwards; or how covetous she grew of the lessening hours, as the time approached for Mark to be thinking of his return to Lowton. All these things can be better imagined than described.

And happy, very happy, was that Christmas to the other girls then enjoying their "outing,"—to Martha, quietly taking note of all her benefactress' ways and wishes, and looking forward to the time when she should be her grateful affectionate attendant; and to Charlotte—listening with loving interest to all her mother's hopes and plans, trials and fears, and thinking of the joy of one day being able to lighten that mother's toil;—and happy, very happy, was that Christmas to Miriam, proving to her mother and sister that their expenditure for her,—the result of their ungrudging labour—was not wasted; and discussing with them her schemes of innocent ambition.

Each of these girls came back with a yet stronger determination to make the most of their school-days at St. Mary's, and that for the best and highest motive which can influence a child—to rejoice the hearts that loved them.

Nor was that Christmas less happy to those children who spent it contentedly within the orphanage walls. There was no lack of fun and frolic, of loving care and tender sympathy; and all the better feelings of their nature were called forth by the presence of their little playmates from St. Joseph's. The kindly care bestowed on themselves by the Sisters, the children of St. Mary's displayed, in their turn, to these little ones—planning for them little gifts—little amusements, laying themselves out with unselfish pains-taking for their entertainment; and thus the sacred ties of home affections were supplied to those who were otherwise completely severed from them.

The Feast of the Circumcision brought to Caroline Saunders the realisation as it seemed of her cherished day-dreams; on that day she first took her place among the lay probationers. As long as Christmas holiday-making lasted, however, the Mother Superior desired that she should go in and out among her former companions.

"On the Feast of the Epiphany," said she, "you shall wish them good-bye, and enter the Mother House for good."

The arrangement gave infinite satisfaction. The children exulting in the fact that their "Carrie" was now an actual probationer forgot that this would entail her separation from themselves; and not till the evening of the Epiphany had arrived, and Carrie, half tears, half smiles, opened her arms to them for a farewell embrace, did they realise that their best loved monitor was really leaving them. Then lamentations broke out on all sides.

"Oh, Carrie," said Rose, clinging to her, "what shall I do without you?"

And the words found many an echo among the rest of her companions.

"Come, my dears," said Sister Mabel, cheerfully, "one would suppose Carrie was going to Australia, instead of only as far as the Mother House. Let your parting be less dismal; bid her 'God speed' with smiling faces."

"Oh, it's impossible to smile, Sister," replied Rose, in a lamentable voice, "when we think that to-morrow we shall have no Carrie."

Carrie tried to laugh.

"I thought this would be my happiest day," said she, "but I have caught the dismals from you, I suppose. I can't think what I should cry for, when I am just getting what I wished for: but then I did not think leaving home,—for this is my home,—would be such a wrench." And thus speaking, she turned herself and folded her arms round Sister Mabel; "My more than mother, my more than mother," she whispered through her tears, "there is a weight on my heart, I don't know what it is;—suppose I should not be found worthy?"

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word," was the Sister's answer. "Offer yourself in faith and love, my child; such an offering will never be rejected. We shall all miss you, Carrie," she continued, "but it is pleasant to know that we are missed; and I shall not cry as my little birds leave my nest, if they fly with the strong wing of self-resignation to take the place assigned them by their Heavenly FATHER."

Carrie's smiles returned, and with more kisses she was slowly making her way through a lane of children towards the door, when Charlotte stopped her, saying,

"Christmas is all gone now, Carrie."

"It will come again," replied Carrie, quickly.

"But will it be as happy as this has been?" said Charlotte.

"Ah, that we cannot tell; but we needn't be making ourselves

miserable with what may be a year hence, need we, Sister?" said Carrie.

"I think not indeed," replied Sister Mabel. "If we have had a happy Christmas, let us thank God for it; and enjoy all the bright days He sends us without fussing as to whether there may be some gloomy ones among them. It is not always fine weather; but when the sun shines we do not begin to cry and say, 'Oh, dear, who knows if it will be a fine day to-morrow;' we run and jump and enjoy ourselves, and if it rains the next day we make the best of it, till the sun comes out again."

The children laughed.

"Let us sing," said Miriam, suddenly. "Carrie, before you go, let us sing 'Farewell to Christmas.'"

She began it, and all the rest joined in the song:

"Farewell to Christmas,
To happy, loving Christmas,
A long farewell, dear Christmastide, until you come again.
We know not if the morrow,
Will bring us joy or sorrow.
Or if our onward path will be in happiness or pain.
But hope springs from Christmas,
And confidence from Christmas,
And eager longings for the joys that never, never wane.
And if, with love adoring,
We've in our hearts been storing
All its lessons, then our Christmas has not passed in vain.
So farewell to Christmas,
To holy, loving Christmas,
A long farewell, dear Christmastide, until you come again."

The children sang themselves into cheerfulness, and let Carrie go at last with more smiles than tears.

The novitiate was empty when the young probationer entered it; one solitary light was burning, and it looked dull after the merry bustle of St. Mary's. But Carrie did not pause to make observations on the room; she stepped to the window and looked out thoughtfully on the starlight night. The sky was cloudless, and burning with its countless gems. The young girl fixed her eyes upon them and stood wrapt in holy meditation.

"All things serve Thee," she murmured. "Oh the joy of serving! of being counted worthy to serve! As all things serve Thee, let me, Thy meanest creature, serve Thee too, O Thou Whose service is the joy of joys. I am Thine; oh, knit my heart to Thee. LORD, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee; behold I give myself without reserve to Thee; Thy will be mine, let nothing separate me, O God, from Thee."

So she stood absorbed in inward communings, till her thoughts at length began to wander backwards and forwards—backwards to her happy childhood—forwards to her self-dedicated life; and then she began singing softly the “Farewell to Christmas,” in which she had so lately joined with her former companions.

Unconsciously she raised her voice as she came to the words,

“And if, with love adoring,

We’ve in our hearts been storing

All its lessons, then our Christmas has not passed in vain;”

and this, possibly, prevented her hearing a footstep that crossed the room. She did not know she was not alone till the Mistress of the Novices laid her hand upon her shoulder. Carrie gave a little start, and coloured partly with pleasure, partly with shyness.

“And what lesson, Caroline,” said the Mistress, “do you think this Christmas has brought specially to you?”

The young probationer cast one glance on the starlit heavens, and then turning to the Sister with kindling eyes, folded her hands reverently, and whispered, “Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TWO PATHS.

AND how did Christmas pass with Jemima and Hetty? The former, after the collapse of the “great case,” had been in a very depressed condition. Her Protestant friends had given her up in apparent disgust as a failure; her grandfather, who had turned a deaf ear to the somewhat indignant remonstrances of his former friend, Sister Katharine, before the case began, now found that between two stools he had come to the ground. Sister Katharine had left him to his self-chosen patrons; and these, having no further use for him, did not trouble their heads as to whether, when Christmas came, he had anything to boil in his pot, or wherewith to keep the pot boiling at all. Work was very slack, and the old man vented his irritation on his unlucky granddaughter as the cause of all his privations.

They kept Christmas Day together as an involuntary fast; but that afternoon Master Turner was favoured with a visit from the “district visitor,” Miss Kettlewell.

She was so very important and mysterious that he supposed she had something special to communicate, and waited with much outward indifference and inward irritation till it suited her convenience to divulge it. But Miss Kettlewell had several things to do first. It was necessary that she should open her communication with a sweeping denunciation of all "superstitious" methods of keeping Christmas Day, and an earnestly expressed hope that he, Turner, did not suppose that the salvation of his soul was advanced by its observance, or the health of his soul improved by eating a better dinner that day than usual.

At the last remark the old man grinned sarcastically, observing, that he did not know how a good dinner might affect his soul, but he was sure that had he been able to obtain any dinner at all that day, it would have been "mortal good for his body."

"Humph!" said Miss Kettlewell. "I am glad to find you have been making no foolish outlay in mince pies and plum pudding."

"I'm not very like to do that 'ere, miss," replied the cobbler, "till I can first get dry bread enough for Jemmy and me."

"What! have those dreadful people at St. Mary's—though why 'Saint' I want to know—have they made no compensation to Jemima for turning her out of their house at the very beginning of the winter? Incredible barbarity!"

"It's not very like as we should get much from they," answered the old man drily, "Mr. Fox Adderly has taken precious good care of that."

"It is as well you should receive nothing from them," said Miss Kettlewell, with lofty virtue, "their pitiful alms would be small compensation for the damage—we trust not as yet wholly irreparable—which they have done to this child's soul. It is about that, Turner, that I called to speak to you."

"Did you, ma'am?" said the disappointed grandfather, hardly able to maintain an outward appearance of unconcern, "I was in hopes, ma'am, (no offence) as how you had called for to give her a chance of getting a bellyful of wittles."

This coarse expression made Miss Kettlewell frown. "A decent maintenance, I presume you mean," she said severely.

"Put it any way you likes, miss," returned the old man, "wittles is wittles; and a growing girl can't live without 'em, nor an old man, neither, not if they had souls in every joint of their bodies."

Miss Kettlewell frowned again. "I have walked down this afternoon to propound a scheme by which it appears to me that Jemima will be greatly benefited both in soul and body."

At this announcement old Turner and his granddaughter cheered up surprisingly; but much patience was needed before the "scheme"

was fully unfolded. We need not follow Miss Kettlewell through the mysterious turnings and windings of her discourse, broken, as it was from time to time, by discouraive expositions of the moral pollution and contagion of "Puseyism;" it will suffice to say that it appeared, at length, that a certain old lady, a friend of the Misses Skinner, was willing to take Jemima into her service as an assistant to her maid; and in return for waiting on the maid, doing needle-work, &c., the old lady, Mrs. Spooner, would clothe and maintain her, and perhaps ultimately give her wages, or find a better place for her. Such unexpected good fortune was so welcome that both old Turner and his granddaughter shed tears of joy, and overwhelmed Miss Kettlewell with broken expressions of gratitude.

Gratified by the result of her communication, that lady proceeded to inform Jemima that she might enter on her duties the very next morning, as Mrs. Spooner was about to depart for London on that day; and finally left the cottage, graciously accepting all thanks as her just due. But, truth to tell, she had really no claim to them whatever. Jemima's benefactress was the maid whom she was to assist. This individual, Mrs. Zilpah Bubb, had taken great interest in all the proceedings of the "Amalgamated Protestants" against St. Mary's. She, equally with Miss Wrigley, though naturally annoyed at their abortive termination, had seen that something might yet be made out of them. To this end it was necessary to possess a little information, a lively imagination, and unlimited assurance. Of the two latter, Mrs. Zilpah Bubb possessed quite as much as Miss Wrigley, though possibly she was not as capable as that lady of giving the results to the world in the form of a thrilling tale, such as the "Young Protestant." "A little information" only was what she now wanted, being fully persuaded of the truth of Mrs. Adderly's observation that, "it is awkward to be altogether in the dark."

Mrs. Zilpah Bubb had long considered that her duties as Mrs. Spooner's attendant were too numerous, and had contemplated commanding her mistress to provide her with an assistant. It now occurred to her that Jemima would be as desirable a helper as she was likely to obtain. She would require small or no wages, could work neatly, read well, and so would be able to work for her while she pursued other avocations more suited to her taste—entertain her when she wished with highly spiced Protestant literature, and, above all, by the information she would be able to give of the interior arrangements of St. Mary's, supply material for unlimited Protestant romance. Having maturely weighed all these advantages, she first gave warning on the score that she could no longer bear the weight of her very onerous duties; and when Mrs. Spooner

wept and lamented at the prospect of losing one who regulated all her actions and opinions, from theology down to the trimming of her cap, and so spared her the trouble of thinking on any subject whatsoever, Mrs. Bubb hinted that assistance in her labours would perhaps induce her to remain a little longer; and on Mrs. Spooner's eagerly grasping at this hope, she intimated her will that her mistress should forthwith engage Jemima Watts, and her command was instantly obeyed.

Mrs. Spooner, on the authority of Mrs. Bubb, believed herself a great invalid; for whom constant change of air and scene were necessary. She lived, therefore, in lodgings, and in constant dread of Mrs. Bubb's orders to move on when that valuable servant considered they had been long enough in one place. Mrs. Bubb having exhausted the excitements of Kirkminster, and secured Jemima's service, had desired her mistress to transfer herself to London; and for London they were accordingly bound.

Jemima was in such a flutter of delight at the wonderful prospect now opening out before her, and her grandfather was so happy at being thus satisfactorily relieved of the responsibility and care of the charge of her, that they parted with mutual satisfaction; and the little maid walked up the lane towards her new home, with her chin very high in the air, and with a profound sense of personal importance. Just as she entered High Street she ran against—or was run against by—a girl coming quickly round the corner.

To her no small pleasure, this proved to be Hetty; pale, thin, miserably clad, and with eyes swollen with weeping. So good an opportunity of exulting over a former companion was not to be neglected; so at the risk of keeping her new mistress waiting, Jemima paused to explain her brilliant prospects.

"But how come you to look so badly off?" asked she, in a patronising tone, when she had finished, and Hetty had responded by a deep sigh.

"Tom Brody was so angry with me because I spoke the truth that day the Sisters were tried," was Hetty's answer, "that he beat me dreadful; and Mrs. Crab is more cruel, I think, every day, and I don't know what to do."

"Why was he so angry?" asked Jemima.

"Because the gentlemen had promised him something for himself if I was a witness, they said; and when Tom Brody went to ask for the money they wouldn't give him any because they said as how I'd witnessed for the Sisters instead of against them. And so he and my sister were just mad with me; and Mrs. Crab, she's always knocking me about, and she calls me 'a beggarly little Puseyite.'"

"What's that mean?" asked Jemima.

"I don't know," replied poor Hetty, "but it sounds awful, doesn't it?"

"I should think so!" said Jemmy thoughtfully. "But why didn't you say what the gentlemen wanted you to?"

"Because then I should have told lies," answered Hetty, and her eyes sparkled.

Jemima pondered. Her intercourse with the "Amalgamated Protestants" had already taught her some of the lore of worldly wisdom. Her mind was fast opening to the fact that "Honesty is" certainly *not* "the best policy," unless it be a calculating, cunning "honesty;" and that the quickest and surest roads to worldly success are the short cuts of falsehood and fraud. With great benevolence she desired to impart some of her lately acquired wisdom to her afflicted companion.

"Hetty," said she, "if I was you, I'd say just what I was wanted to; after all it doesn't signify, and if you was to please the gentlefolk you'd most likely get as good a place as mine. Look at my nice new frock and cloak and bonnet, my mistress, Mrs. Spooner, gave them to me."

Hetty's pale cheeks flushed crimson. "I *won't*, Jemmy," she exclaimed passionately, "I won't tell any more lies. I wouldn't wear such clothes as yours, and get them by lying, no, not for all the gold and silver in the world. Ain't you ashamed of yourself! I'd be if I was you. Get along with you, do!" and with that the indignant Hetty caught up the basket in which were the purchases she had been making for her mistress, and set off with rapid, angry steps towards Althorne.

Jemima looked after her somewhat disconcerted, and her uncomfortable feelings did not leave her till she found herself formally installed in her new place; when the manifest superiority of her position over Hetty's, convinced her of the soundness of her own views; and her conscience, making a virtue of necessity, gave up whispering troublesome misgivings, and settled down quietly into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Meantime Hetty's anger spurred her on till she reached the long, tedious road that led direct to Althorne. There, sitting down to rest for a few moments on a milestone, she thought over Jemima's words, and contrasted her position with her own.

Jemima had lied, and slandered, and, as a result, she was prosperous, well clothed, well fed; her future fair and promising before her. She, Hetty, had clung to the truth, had repented of the past; had sought to "cleanse her heart" in the "Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,"¹ and to "wash her hands in innocency;"²

¹ Zechariah xiii. 1.

² Ps. lxxiii. 12, 13.

and yet, "all the day long had she been punished and chastened every morning." No wonder that this mystery of the Divine dealings was "too hard" for her, seeing it had puzzled the Psalmist himself;¹ no wonder that she felt herself forsaken, that a doubt of her Heavenly FATHER's *justice* arose in her mind; no wonder that seeing no one was within sight or hearing, she gave unrestrained vent to her almost despairing grief; that she "cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry," and that her heart whispered, "it is no use to do right."

But her tears ceased at last, and holy words she had heard and learnt at St. Mary's came back to her like whispers from Heaven. "Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth;" "GOD dealeth with us as with sons;" "It is good for me that I have been afflicted;" "Before I was troubled I went wrong;" and she seemed to hear again Mr. Neville's words, "The greatest curse which can be pronounced by GOD upon a soul is, 'Let her alone.'"

"I won't despair," thought the little girl, looking up into the troubled winter sky. "I have deserved it all; I will bear it. Help me, O LORD. At the end of a year Mrs. Neville will find me a place if only I can win a good character. Ah, there are more than ten months yet till then! Never mind, I won't be down-hearted, and I won't tell lies."

She wiped her eyes, took up her basket, and trudged on again; repeating all the way, and the more earnestly as she neared her mistress' house, her little prayer, "LORD, help me."

Help was nearer than she thought for. That very day Sister Ruth's admirer, Mrs. Trueman, was assisting one Mrs. Freeling, the wife of a farmer near Althorne in a great wash.

Mrs. Freeling had been lamenting bitterly over the impossibility of getting a girl fit for anything in these degenerate days. She had had one after another and all had turned out, she complained, equally bad; girls were the great affliction of Mrs. Feeling's life. From the shortcomings of girls in general, the conversation turned upon the orphans of St. Mary's; and Mrs. Trueman diverging again from this topic gave a very graphic description of the "trial," as the Kirkminsterians called it, which had taken place in the Town Hall on the first of the preceding month.

Mrs. Freeling listened—ejaculated, and became finally lost in consideration. "Now, I'll tell you what," said she, breaking in on the flow of Mrs. Trueman's talk which had never ceased, "I don't know nothing of 'Puseyism,' not what it means, nor nothing about it, but if these girls at St. Mary's are taught to work well

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 15.

and speak the truth I should like to get one of them, I know, that's all."

"Then you couldn't do better," said Mrs. Trueman, "than have that atomy of a thing they called Hester Dale. Bless you! you should have heard how she would stick to what she knew was true, and no one could move her from it. And how she owned she'd been a naughty girl, but she'd never do so no more, brought tears to my eyes, that it did."

Mrs. Freeling hesitated. She doubted the wisdom of engaging "an atomy;" and in spite of Mrs. Trueman's positively expressed assurance that "she'd grow," seemed to think the fact of Hetty's being such, counterbalanced whatever might be her other possible qualifications.

It was finally arranged, however, that Mrs. Trueman should make inquiries about the girl; and having thus found her out, her mother's heart warmed still more towards the hard-worked neglected orphan, and, so good a friend did she prove to poor Hetty, that she never rested till she had "spoken her mind," to Mrs. Brody, caused the child to be withdrawn from Mrs. Crab's, and worried Mrs. Freeling into taking her "on trial."

In spite of her lamentations over her own folly in yielding to Mrs. Trueman's importunities, and engaging this little undersized starveling, Mrs. Freeling very soon discovered that her new girl was thoroughly to be trusted; and though she saddened poor Hetty's spirit by her perpetual complaints of her weakness and small stature, yet she was inwardly content with the child's readiness and hearty will.

It was a hard place, no doubt, much too hard a place, really, for a girl of Hetty's age and size; but then she was now well fed, and her anxiety to do her duty was an effectual spur to her. Mrs. Freeling never ceased pitying herself and claiming the sympathy of her neighbours on account of the inefficiency of her little servant, yet she became daily more and more satisfied with her, and one day finding her in tears, and eliciting that she was fretting because "Missis was vexed that she was so small," and grieving that "she couldn't help missis better," the good woman undertook to comfort her by adopting Mrs. Trueman's assurance that she would certainly "grow;" adding that she herself was quite willing to wait that desirable consummation, and meantime was satisfied that she did her best, "and no one can do no more," she observed, "and Letitia Freeling ain't the woman to expect it."

Hetty curtsied gratefully, and dried her eyes. The "growing" proved a very tedious affair; but though her body continued small, *her strength increased*, and her will grew daily firmer.

Time was when she had been a foolish irresolute child falling an easy prey to a wicked companion; now she was an earnest-minded girl holding her own amidst temptation, and discouragement, with a settled purpose before her of which she never lost sight. That purpose was the winning "a good character;" and by this Hetty did not understand the mere *pleasing* of those about her; we have seen that she was determined not to please if by so doing her true character would suffer. No, Hetty's idea of a "good character," was that which she had derived from her teaching at St. Mary's, namely her "sanctification;" that is, the acquisition of such truth and purity of deed, and word, and thought, that there should be nothing in her that she would hide from the eye of GOD. And she knew this was possible. That was the secret of her energy. She knew her every effort was known and appreciated by Him for whose approval she craved; that was the mainspring of her strength. "It was possible," for "This is the will of GOD, even your sanctification," and if the human will is united to the will of GOD, nothing can resist it; for after every triumph, however small, a will so united becomes stronger and stronger. "All such triumphs would be known and approved," for, "The LORD seeth not as man seeth, but the LORD looketh on the heart," and to the loving heart that longs to please Him He speaks those sweet words of praise and acceptance, "She hath done what she could."

So Hetty persevered, though her young life passed in shadow. Hard work from morning till night, little encouragement, no praise, no religious privileges, beyond the once-a-day Sunday attendance at church, (how precious this was to Hetty now,) no one to listen to her difficulties, or help her with advice. But that had happened of which the Superior had spoken, namely, the hard crust of her heart was completely broken up, the good seed which had lain on the surface had dropped in; simple prayers had brought down the dew of Heaven upon it, it was fast springing up, and ripening already for harvest.

After several months of earnest labour a very unexpected ray of sunshine fell across Hetty's path. Her mistress offered her a holiday. Mr. Freeling was going to St. John's Common, would Hetty like to go and see the Sisters?

The girl's joyful astonishment rendered her speechless, but no one could mistake the answer she would have made. Mrs. Freeling laughed good-naturedly, and bade her make haste and get herself ready; and when Hetty returned that evening from her expedition radiant with delight, and overflowing with gratitude, so well satisfied was her mistress with the result of her little treat, that she allowed her to repeat it from time to time; and after every visit to St.

Mary's Hetty returned more and more satisfied with her place, more eager than ever to approve herself worthy of her early training, and with a very sweet hope springing up in her heart.

On one of her visits Mr. Neville had seen her; had called her to him; had spoken a few words of affectionate approval to her; had given her his blessing, and as she rose from her knees, Miss Mary, who was standing by, had exclaimed, "After all, Hetty, why should not you one day be a 'Child of Mary?' one of the outer Confraternity girls I mean. You know their motto, 'As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.'"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LITTLE CLOUD.

WE have thus far anticipated Hetty's career, because it will be long before she reappears in the pages of this history.

We will here merely add that at the end of her year's probation Mrs. Neville, having satisfied herself that Mrs. Freeling was content with her little maid, and anxious to do her duty by her, bade Hetty consider that situation her permanent place till her age and qualifications might entitle her to higher wages than Mrs. Freeling could afford to give. Hetty desired nothing better, and buckled to her work so heartily that Mrs. Freeling confided to Mrs. Trueman during another "wash," that "though that girl wasn't much to look at, she'd sooner lose one of her fingers than her; for I believe," said she emphatically, "that she works even better when I'm out of the way than when I'm looking after her; and as to her word, I no more doubt it than I doubt my own eyes. And I only wish there was more 'Puseyites'—if so be that's what these ladies at St. Mary's are called—in the world for to train girls for farmers' houses, so I do. And my master says he wishes they'd train him a bailiff, for he's sure that fellow Collins, with all his sanctimonious ways makes away with them oats, and how's one to tell? there's no more trusting him no more than nothing."

Being thus favourably disposed towards the teaching of St. Mary's Mrs. Freeling made no objection to her little maid ultimately receiving the rite of Confirmation with the candidates from the Mission House in Kirkminster; and, after an interval of ignorant opposition, suffered her, at length, to avail herself of her full Church privileges,

by participating in the priceless benefit of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

Having said this much, we will now leave Hester Dale steadily and prayerfully pursuing the path of duty, and follow *Jemima Watts* to London.

The rooms engaged for Mrs. Spooner by her invaluable servant, Mrs. *Zilpah Bubb*, were in a house occupied by a friend of the latter, one Mrs. *M'Crae*, her husband, and sister-in-law. Mrs. and Miss *M'Crae* were dressmakers, Mr. *M'Crae* was a retired "messman," from a cavalry regiment. They had specially invited Mrs. *Bubb* to spend "New Year's Day," with them; hence that lady's anxiety to get her mistress off to town with as little delay as possible.

The same day, therefore, which saw *Caroline Saunders* admitted as a probationer into the "order of St. Mary and St. John," witnessed a very cozy supper party in Mrs. *M'Crae's* parlour; and when the hot punch, dispensed by Mr. *M'Crae* on the occasion, had further loosened tongues at all times sufficiently loquacious, Mrs. *Bubb* sent for *Jemima*, and, after administering to her a cautious dose of this inspiring medicine, proceeded to "draw her out," concerning St. Mary's.

At first *Jemima* was shy and nervous, for Mr. *M'Crae* was a grave and awful personage to behold, and Mrs. and Miss *M'Crae* were very grand ladies indeed; far grander than any one *Jemima* had ever seen at *Kirkminster*; and she felt overwhelmed by the fumes of the hot spirits, Mr. *M'Crae's* pipe, and the gorgeous attire of her two lady entertainers.

By degrees, however, the punch loosened her tongue also, and so greatly assisted her imagination, that, with the judicious help of Mrs. *Bubb*, and being further aided by Miss *M'Crae's* eagerness for information, she became almost brilliant.

Mr. *M'Crae* under the united influence of the pipe, the punch, and the ladies' conversation, was soon wrapped in profound slumber; and Mrs. *M'Crae* sat with her feet on the fender sipping her glass of punch abstractedly, but seemingly quite uninterested in *Jemima's* revelations, till something was said about the needlework at St. Mary's, and the "orders" which the orphans occasionally had to execute.

"Sometimes they were beautiful things for ladies' trousseaux," said *Jemima*, "and sometimes they were little things for babies."

"You don't mean to tell me," said Mrs. *M'Crae*, "that any of you children in a humdrum place like that could work well enough for ladies' trousseaux?" As she spoke, Mrs. *M'Crae* set down her glass, and drew her chair nearer the table.

"Oh yes, indeed, ma'am," replied Jemima eagerly, "not that I could," she added modestly, and with a deprecating glance at Mrs. Bubb, "but some of the girls did. There's Carrie Saunders, she works so beautifully, that Sister Louise and Sister Ruth said one day that they couldn't do better themselves."

"Who is Carrie Saunders?" asked Miss M'Crae; but Mrs. M'Crae's temporary interest being by this time seemingly exhausted, that lady turned to the fire and poked it so violently that Mr. M'Crae started in his sleep, and his sonorous snores ceased for some three minutes or so.

"Who is Carrie Saunders?" asked Miss M'Crae once more, when Mrs. M'Crae had arranged the fire to her satisfaction.

Curiously enough, though Jemima in her anxiety to oblige her new friends was willing, and even eager, to speak to the disadvantage of everything, and everybody, connected with St. Mary's, yet there was a lingering home-sickness in her heart, which made her feel pleasure in talking of her old friends and companions. And now she poured out the praises of Carrie Saunders without stint. Indeed Carrie was one of those gentle, loving creatures, that no one with any heart at all could hate; and she had inspired such love in all her companions that even Jemima sounded her praise ungrudgingly.

"Why does she stop there," said Mrs. M'Crae presently, "if she's such a good workwoman? Why doesn't she get apprenticed to some business?"

"Oh, Carrie will never leave St. Mary's, I'm sure, ma'am," replied Jemima, "she thinks there's no place like it in the world; and she's always saying she means to be a Sister there, if the Mother and the Sisters will let her."

"And then these people will have all the benefits of her work," exclaimed Mrs. M'Crae, once more evincing an interest in Jemima's communications. "Why she'll be worth ever so much a year to them!"

"Of course she will, that's their system," observed Mrs. Bubb, in a tone of injured virtue.

And then Mrs. Bubb and Miss M'Crae rambled on in duet for full ten minutes on the iniquity of such an arrangement, and Mrs. M'Crae drank more punch, and looked very angry.

It was getting late now. Mrs. Bubb had taken quite as much punch as was good for her, and indeed a little more; she began to think of sending Jemima to bed, and of herself accompanying her; but Mrs. M'Crae would not let them go yet. She seemed strangely interested all at once in everything that concerned Carrie Saunders, and plied Jemima with numberless questions. When all were an-

swered, and truly this time, for there seemed no reason why Jemima should in this instance tell fibs,—neither did Mrs. M'Crae apparently desire it, (a circumstance which weighed much with Jemima,)—when all were answered then, there remained this impression on the minds of all Jemima's hearers—namely, that Carrie Saunders was of an exceedingly amiable disposition—highly conscientious—according to Jemima's ideas “very clever,” and singularly obedient and tractable.

Mrs. M'Crae pressed Jemima with so many and such various questions all tending to elicit these facts, that Mrs. Bubb and Miss M'Crae sat by open-mouthed with astonishment, wondering what could have inspired Mrs. M'Crae with such sudden interest in a St. Mary monitor. But on Miss M'Crae venturing to ask the cause of all these inquiries, Mrs. M'Crae turned surly, and was so unpleasant in her replies, that Mrs. Bubb again thought of retiring to rest, and this time was allowed to make her adieu without any opposition on the part of her entertainer.

Mr. M'Crae had so completely succumbed to the punch that it was impossible to rouse him, so he was insensible to Mrs. Bubb's parting benediction. Miss M'Crae seeing that her sister-in-law was also rather the worse for the festivities of the evening, suggested that they should cover up Mr. M'Crae, and leave him to undisturbed repose, while they went to their own; but Mrs. M'Crae answered shortly, that “she shouldn't go till she chose,” and remained sitting in front of the fire, her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, lost in gloomy meditation.

Miss M'Crae knowing that punch had a deleterious effect on her sister's temper, attempted no opposition, but being nervous about fire thought she would keep guard till it pleased that lady to retire.

So she sat nodding on one side of the hearth, and Mrs. M'Crae brooding on the other, till the latter suddenly roused herself up, and pushing back her chair, exclaimed in language that need not be transcribed that she would have Carrie Saunders out of St. Mary's before she was a month older.

Miss M'Crae awakened, startled, and amazed by her sister-in-law's vehemence, sat staring speechlessly at her; but at length ventured to inquire, “My dear Flora, what can you possibly have to do with this girl?”

“Am I not her mother?” exclaimed Mrs. M'Crae fiercely.

At which amazing announcement Miss M'Crae sank back in her chair, repeating, “Her mother!”

“Did you not know that I was a widow when I married your brother?” asked Mrs. M'Crae, who, seeing the murder was out,

had yet sufficient presence of mind remaining to make the best of it.

"I know that you were the widow of Mr. Bodgers," replied Miss M'Crae in a tone of perplexity.

"And did you not know that before I married him I was the widow of William Saunders?"

"No, indeed!" as how should she? seeing Mrs. M'Crae had never before alluded to the existence of Mr. Saunders.

"Well I was," said the late Mrs. Saunders loftily; "and I had this one child, and when I married Mr. Bodgers and went out with him to India I left her with my mother, and she, to save herself trouble, I suppose, sent her to be brought up by these miserable nuns."

"How shocking!" exclaimed Miss M'Crae, "and did you not know this till this evening? what a shock it must have been to you! But my brother, does he know of this child?"

"I knew where the girl was," replied Mrs. M'Crae, "I found it out when I went to Kirkminster three years ago."

The object of Mrs. M'Crae's journey there had been to ascertain whether Mr. Saunders was still living, that she might know what line of conduct it would be most prudent for her to take, now that she had returned to England as the wife of Norman M'Crae. Great had been her joy to find that her heartbroken husband and mother were both lying in Kirkminster churchyard, and that her deserted child was safe out of the way at St. Mary's. She had continued to maintain a careful reserve in all mention of her past history, and had not Jemima's tale of Carrie's talents awakened her greed, and the punch undermined her habitual caution, it is possible that neither Mr. nor Miss M'Crae would ever have known of poor Carrie's existence. Now Miss M'Crae was both surprised and shocked, and showed it so plainly that it recalled Mrs. M'Crae to herself.

"I cannot think why you have never mentioned all this before, or how you could have left that poor child a prey to Puseyites and Papists!"

"I did not like to mention the girl's existence," replied Mrs. M'Crae plaintively, "because your brother would have thought I wanted her rescued at his expense, and as he had so generously married me, though I had no money whatever—as you know Bodgers was so dreadfully in debt, I could not bear the idea of bringing an extra burden upon him."

Here Mrs. M'Crae put her handkerchief to her eyes and wept; and Miss M'Crae whose prudent economy exceeded even her antipathy to Puseyism, embraced her with much sisterly warmth, and begged *her pardon* if she had in any way wounded her feelings.

So far nothing could be more satisfactory ; and the sisters parted for the night in much amity.

The next morning Mrs. M'Crae would, had it been possible, have recalled her communication of the night before ; but that was now out of her power. Mr. M'Crae must now know it too. He was surprised, but as much gratified as his sister at his wife's tender consideration for his pocket. As, however, Caroline Saunders had by this time arrived at an age, and was possessed of sufficient attainments, to bring money in, instead of drawing it out, he cordially agreed to his wife's original idea that all profits arising from the young girl's work were the rightful possession of her mother ; and chuckled over the pleasing reflection that the Sisters had had all the expense and trouble of her maintenance and education for so many years, and that they, the M'Craes, would now reap the harvest. Indeed this last consideration pleased him so much that he kissed his wife, and suggested that he was willing to welcome his step-daughter as soon as possible.

But Mrs. M'Crae was in no hurry. Now that it had come to the point she shrank from having William Saunders' daughter under her roof. She had heard enough during her secret visit to Kirkminster of the deathbeds of her husband and mother, not to wish to have continually before her one who would be a perpetual remembrance of them ; so she thanked Mr. M'Crae, and said there was no hurry, she must make certain arrangements first, and avoided the subject, much to her sister-in-law's surprise, who, on the evening of the 6th (the very evening that witnessed the young probationer's farewell to her companions) brought the matter up again, suggesting that there was a good deal of work on hand, and asking when Mrs. M'Crae would send for her daughter.

"I cannot whilst we are in this house," replied Mrs. M'Crae, rather testily ; "there is not room ; there's no need to have her till Miss Jackson is out of her time. Norman, too, seems quite bent on moving to Edinburgh soon ; we had better wait till then."

"But that will not be for a year at least," argued Miss M'Crae, "and all this time she is with those dreadful nuns. Do think of her soul, Flora."

"Nonsense ; she has been there so long, a year more or less can't make any difference."

"Oh, surely !" exclaimed the scandalised Miss M'Crae, "every year will make her more and more a Puseyite."

"Do you think I shan't be able to knock every atom of Puseyism out of her before she's been with me a week ?" replied Mrs. M'Crae scornfully. "What's the use of being her mother if I can't make her any religion I choose ? I'm not one to stand any nonsense, that

you must know, Eliza ; let her show any Puseyism to me and she'll be sorry for it, that's all !"

This assurance pacified Miss M'Crae. Her sister-in-law convinced her it would be more prudent not to reclaim Carrie till Miss Jackson had finished her time ; so the unconscious probationer basked in the present sunshine, and went on her way rejoicing.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CONFIRMATION.

HOW quickly days grow into weeks, and weeks into months ! Silently and swiftly Christmas passed to Epiphany, and Epiphany was swallowed up in the solemn days of Lent ; and then came the confirmation.

Sunday by Sunday had Mark presented himself a willing pupil before the priest's daughter, and when the groundwork of knowledge had been well laid, Mr. Neville himself took him in hand, and there grew up between the priest and the candidate that tender reverential bond of fatherly care and interest on the one side, and of filial love and trust on the other,—that bond which, when once firmly knotted, no evil power can ever loosen or destroy : such a bond as existed between St. Paul and his Corinthian converts, "As my beloved sons," he writes, "I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in CHRIST, yet have ye not many fathers : for in CHRIST JESUS I have begotten you through the Gospel."

Mark had always, as we have seen, been an honest, loving-hearted man ; but under such teaching as he now received, these mere pleasing gifts of character gradually matured into the richer fruits of grace. His confirmation took place at Lowton, where perhaps he was the only candidate who understood that he was receiving a renewal of his baptismal grace, as well as renewing, on his part, his baptismal vows. The teaching of the Lowton candidates had been of the vaguest, most fragmentary description. Mark had attended with them the "classes," and finally, after a hazy exhortation not to suppose that confirmation was anything but "an edifying ceremony, the origin and historical date of which was uncertain," received a ticket inscribed with his name and age, and bearing the words, "examined and approved by me, A. Dean, Vicar of Lowton."

For his first communion, Mark, with Mr. Neville's permission, presented himself at the altar of the chapel of St. John. There, followed by the earnest childish prayers of his admiring and happy little sister, he knelt with the Chaplain's own candidates and spiritual children to receive that first pledge of the actual Communion of Saints, that wondrous Bread of Life, in the Strength of which he would be able to hold on his way without faltering or turning aside,—to "run" in "the way of God's commandments" and "not be weary"—to walk in the "narrow way that leadeth unto Life" "and not faint."

Amongst the St. Mary candidates was Rose Berger; very earnestly had she prepared herself for this great day, and her first words to Sister Mabel after the service were, "Surely, Sister, now I shall be 'recollected.' Oh, it seems impossible I could ever now forget."

"You may forget, my child," replied the Sister tenderly, "but He Who has now given you His very Self will not forget you. Ah, Rose, my child, should not such love shame us? To think that we are the objects of such love, and what a return we make!"

Rose's eyes sparkled through tears.

"Sister, I do love, I love with all my heart, I will not forget—"

The Sister stopped her mouth.

"When St. Peter boasted 'though all should forsake Thee yet will not I,' the LORD to make him feel the weakness of his own poor unassisted efforts withdrew His hand from him, and he fell—fell as he could never have supposed it possible that he—Peter—the called of GOD, could fall. Afterwards, Rose, his language was simply this, 'LORD, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee';—no professions of service then, only a humble appeal to the LORD's own knowledge of his heart; a lowly waiting on the LORD for grace to be true to that love."

Rose warmly returned the Sister's motherly kiss.

"But for all that," said she to herself, as she sat down alone in the oratory to think over the events of the day, "I am quite sure that I shall always remember 'Whose I am, and Whom I serve,' for the future. Oh, yes, I shall always now be 'recollected.'"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHANGES.

THE spring brought changes,—changes boding that there were more clouds than one on the horizon of St. Mary's. But how merciful is that dispensation of Almighty God which conceals approaching trouble, and lets it fall gently like a needful rainfall on hearts requiring it to make the good seed sprout, or fill to perfection the already swelling grain.

The children of St. Mary's sported and frolicked in the sunshine; and so little did they apprehend coming grief, that the very changes seemed but to add to the joy of the passing hour, and years afterwards *that* year appeared to many of them, when they looked back upon it, as one of the brightest of their childhood.

Their seniors were longer-sighted, and saw the coming clouds; but even to them they brought merely a chastened awe, no fear, and scarcely grief.

The first was the gradual sickening of little Sanna. The Sisters who tended the motherless child had little hope of her ultimate recovery; but her companions only saw in her gradual decay of strength an additional reason for petting and making much of her. Always a favourite, she was more so now than ever, and the child herself rejoiced in their pettings and in their love.

Now and then she was carried off to the Infirmary to be nursed through some fresh attack of her malady; but then came the pleasure to her companions of being allowed to be her "visitors," and the pleasure to Sanna of being "visited," and so patient and bright was the little invalid that no thought of gloom was ever associated in the children's minds with her illness.

Her appearance in the orphanage after one of these attacks, "quite well," as she described herself, was a red-letter day to the orphans, but to none more so than to Rose, Sanna's chosen friend.

Sister Mabel saw with delight how this girl, destitute of all known relations, had bestowed on the sick child all an elder sister's affection; and how Sanna, who had never known a sister's love, responded to it with corresponding trust and confidence.

The other cloud hung over the Chaplain's house. As the winter yielded to spring, and spring blossomed into summer, Mrs. Neville felt more and more that her evening of life was fast drawing on. To her it brought no sadness, only a tender regret at leaving *the husband* to whom she had been so true a helpmate; but even

that was almost annulled by the feeling that Mary would supply her place, and the thought of their future meeting.

"It will be only for a little while," she said to him, as he turned away his head to hide the spasm of grief that seized him at the knowledge that this true and tender friend, the brave, loving-hearted woman who had fulfilled her mission so nobly, strengthening his hands, lightening his cares, smoothing his path, furthering his schemes for the glory of GOD as perhaps no other person could have done,—was to leave him. The Priest's wife had had a distinct work to perform, and she had done it. Her bodily strength had failed in the conflict, but she had laboured till death; her children around her called her blessed, she had been indeed a crown to her husband, and now she patiently awaited the approval of her Divine Master.

When the first pang was over, she and her husband were able to converse quite quietly and even cheerfully over the approaching change. They had lived all their lives in such complete realisation of the presence of GOD, they had loved, and worked, and suffered with the same high aim and object so continually before them, that death could bring no terror; and, after awhile, but little that could be called grief. The old man knew he also was nearing the goal; "all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come," was the language of his heart.

Mary, long accustomed to her mother's ailments, saw nothing in her increasing lassitude but fresh opportunities for love and self-devotion; and the more necessary she felt herself in her home, the higher rose her spirits, the more joyous she became. There is surely no more exhilarating sensation than the certain knowledge that we are walking in a path God's own hand has distinctly marked out for us, that our work is of His own "planning," so clearly traced that we cannot by any possibility be making a mistake in following it. So Mary also basked in the sunshine, her parents carefully concealing from her any cause for sorrow. They knew that the blow when it did come would wring that young soul with an almost intolerable agony, that it would be to her the first great life-shock sent to root the plant of grace more firmly in her heart. These first blows fall with such agonizing intensity, that could the heart foresee them it would be paralysed with horror long before they came. So the Priest and his wife acted towards their child as God Himself deals with His children; and Mary rejoicing in her daily increasing labours of love, waited on both with a love unembittered by any forebodings.

Meanwhile time and change were busy with Lydia Lee. She had grown strong and active, and spurred on by the ambition of

true love, promised soon to be one of the best workwomen in the orphanage. Mark's lamentable hose had all found their way to St. Mary's, and, instructed by Sister Ruth, Lydia had in her play-hours "refooted" them to the great admiration of Mark and old Mrs. Goodwin. Under the same kind teaching she had patched and repaired his shirts, and Sister Mabel watched with delight the loving unselfishness that was gradually moulding the child's character to the highest type of womanly devotion.

But when the shirts were mended, a grander scheme occurred to the little girl. She confided it to no one but Sister Ruth; it was nothing less than to *make* a shirt entirely herself from the very beginning.

"I don't want any one to touch it but me, Sister," she whispered confidentially; "I want to cut it out, and fix it, and make it, and mark it, so that I may be able to say it's all my own work, my very, very own. Don't you think Mark would like that, Sister?"

"Indeed he would," was the reply; "but you can't cut out yet, dear."

"But I'll learn, I'll learn. Sister, may I stand by the cutting-out table when you're getting the work ready? Will you ask Sister Mabel if I may?"

Sister Ruth promised she would ask, and leave was readily obtained. Love is the best master, and the aptest pupil, and so the little girl soon unravelled the mystery of "cutting-out" and fixing.

So occupied was she with her various little schemes for her brother, that she never gave a thought as to what sort of marks were standing against her name in the mark-book. She did her duty as it came to her day by day without a thought of self.

Not so Rose Berger. For some months after her Confirmation her conduct was unexceptionable. The period of recollection did indeed appear to have arrived. But then Rose's mind was perpetually dwelling on the mark-book, and the "recollectedness" of her present demeanour was perhaps as much owing to a strong secret ambition to win a blue ribbon as to any realization of the presence of God. But not even to herself did she acknowledge how a desire for the position of monitor possessed her.

Now and then she heard a whisper which made her pulses throb with expectation. She read approval in every tone and glance of Sister Mabel. She overheard her companions discussing among themselves who were likely to be monitors next "8th," and caught the sound of her own name spoken as if her promotion were certain.

Two other names were mentioned with it, Charlotte's and Harriet Bond's. But when Charlotte overheard these whispers, the *once* proud self-confident "red ribbon" shook her head. Recent

events had humbled her, and she had lost all desire, even of being raised in any measure above her companions. Harriet Bond, on the contrary, candidly expressed her wish to be a "blue ribbon," but this seemed to spring more from a desire to prove herself worthy of the ribbon she had already won, and not to disappoint Sister Mabel's expectations, than from any ambition of personal advancement.

But carefully as Rose concealed her secret hopes, there was one, however, who shaped them into words, and whispered them in her ear.

"I long for next 8th," said Sanna, with her arm round Rose's waist, and her head on her shoulder, "I know you will have the blue ribbon this year, I am sure of it; and I shall be so happy then,—I want you so to be a 'child of Mary.'"

"Nonsense, Sanna!"

"Oh, but it isn't nonsense at all. I am sure of it, and so are all the girls."

"Then they are all geese," laughed Rose, crimsoning with pleasure, and turning away her head to conceal the pleasant confusion these words had caused her. "You've just as much chance as I; why shouldn't *you* be a 'child of Mary?'"

"Because I'm too sickly, and too little, and no use, and not good enough," said Sanna, "and then I'm so very stupid."

Rose laughed, kissed her, and called her a "simpleton," but her heart beat high with exultation. Such a description certainly did not apply to her, so whispered something within her. Strong, active, one of the first in lessons, work, and play, conscious of good abilities, and satisfied with the state of her mark-book, Rose's bright eyes sparkled more brightly, her light step grew lighter, she felt herself able to lead and control her companions, and they submitted willingly to her leadership and control.

Rose's words had meanwhile raised a new feeling in Sanna's breast. "Why shouldn't *you* be a 'child of Mary?'" Rose had said, and Sanna repeated the question to herself,—"*What is 'a child of Mary,' and why shouldn't I be one?*"

She pondered this deeply one lovely summer's evening, her companions were all at play, and she sitting alone under the tree we have more than once mentioned at the end of the playground.

"It is getting too near sundown for you to be out, my little maid," said a voice behind her; "what are you meditating on so profoundly?"

"Sister," replied the little girl, drawing her Superior down beside her, and creeping into her arms, "I was thinking what a child of Mary really is, and why I shouldn't be one."

"And what conclusion did you come to?" asked the Sister, smiling.

"I thought, 'a child of Mary' must be one who loved our Blessed LORD better than any one else in the whole world, and who would like everything that He liked, and think everything best that He thought best, and who wouldn't be afraid to see Him," said the child, speaking in a tone of awe, "but who would like to be with Him, and never leave Him, and never do anything to vex and grieve Him. Sister, I would like to be that. I am so often naughty now," she clasped her arms round the Sister's neck, and her blue eyes filled with tears, "but, oh, I long not to be naughty any more, and I do not feel afraid, not of Him, I mean. Did you see that cloud that looked like gold just now, Sister? I thought perhaps the 'clouds and great glory' there'd be when He comes again would be something like that. And then I wished He would come, and I thought how glad I should be, and I wondered why the Bible says, 'all the tribes of the earth will mourn' when they see His Sign in the heavens and know He is coming. I should have thought everybody would shout for joy; for only think, Sister, when He comes nothing will ever be wrong any more!"

Sister Mabel could not immediately reply, her own heart echoed the child's longing. Sanna's next words, however, recalled her to herself. "But then I should never be able to be a monitor, I'm too little and weak, and no one would ever mind me. But then to be sure I shall grow and get stronger."

"You may be a 'child of Mary,' my love, but I do not think you will ever be a monitor," replied the Sister gravely.

Sanna turned and looked at her inquiringly.

"Do you remember when the girls were talking about what they would like to be when they were grown up, last Christmas Eve, what you said, Sanna?"

"I think, Sister," replied the child considering, "that I said I'd rather leave that to father, and be whatever he liked best."

"You did. Now suppose your 'FATHER, Which is in Heaven,' had made His decision known concerning you, should you be equally satisfied?"

"I think so, I suppose so," replied Sanna hesitatingly.

"My little girl, we do not think it is GOD's will that you should ever grow up. We think you may still be spared to us perhaps for many months, but that you will not grow stronger, but weaker; that your Heavenly FATHER wills you to finish your earthly course while you are still a little girl."

Sanna did not speak or move. She lay quite still in the Sister's arms. "Then I shall see Him," she whispered at last.

"Yes, my darling."

"Sister, I don't know why I am crying," said the child presently, as she burst into tears. "But I wish our dear LORD would come to me here. I shall be so lonely and shy there, I wish you and Rose could go with me."

"I don't think you need be afraid of being shy and lonely, my child," replied the Sister, smiling. "Depend upon it such feelings will be impossible in the wonderful world where we shall see the LORD as He is."

Sanna's next question affected the Sister painfully. "Do people suffer very much when they die, Sister? will it hurt me?"

"My little one, no one can answer that question. To some, death comes quite painlessly, like sleep. Do not dwell upon that—don't think of it at all, but be a true 'child of Mary,' and be quite sure that all these things will be arranged as is best for us. Think of nothing but the love of Him Who has done so much for you, and live day by day as in His presence. Do you think," she added, "that I should desert any of my children on their dying beds, or allow them to endure any suffering which was not necessary, and which I could remove?"

"Oh, Sister, no!"

"Then, Sanna, is it likely that He Who loves more than any human being can love, would leave one of His little ones to die alone, or in unnecessary suffering?"

"No, Sister."

"Then leave all that to Him, my darling. Don't trouble your poor little head about what will be ordered in perfect love for you. Say, 'Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word.'"

Sanna looked up and smiled, and repeated the words after the Sister.

"Now I am going to take you in. I have arranged with Sister Jane that you shall sleep in the little west infirmary, it will be quieter for you than the dormitory. You can spend your days with us, unless you feel poorly, and then Rose or Lydia, or any other crouny you like, shall come and look after you."

Her voice and words were cheery, and she rose as she spoke. Sanna clung fast to her hand, and followed her silently to the infirmary. There Sister Mabel herself prepared her for her night's rest; and, as the child was wakeful and restless, sat down with her on her lap at the window, talked to her, sang to her, afterwards knelt and prayed with her; and finally laid her down to sleep and sat by her bedside till the blue eyes were really closed in slumber.

The little invalid was weaker, of that there could be no doubt;

but she still spent her days with her companions, clinging to Rose more closely than ever. Of the conversation she had had with Sister Mabel, however, she never spoke, not even to this chosen companion; but over and over she would say coaxingly, "Rose, you must be a 'child of Mary' this 8th; I have set my heart upon it."

Ah! and so had Rose too; but her motive and Sanna's were not quite the same.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LOST OR WON?

IT was about the end of August that Lydia considered she was capable of "cutting out" and "fixing" a shirt without assistance or advice, and Sister Ruth agreed with her.

"But now what are you going to do about material?" inquired the latter.

Lydia explained that on the September visiting day she meant to ask Mark for money enough to buy as much as she should require.

"But then he'll guess your secret," said Sister Ruth.

"Oh, no," replied Lydia, "I shall only say I want the money, and shall tell him he must on no account ask what it's for."

"But will Mark let a scrap like you have money without knowing what it's for?"

"Indeed he will," laughed Lydia. "I wish visiting day were here!"

Whilst waiting for this much desired time, she spent several recreation hours in assisting Sanna to make and dress dolls for the little ones at St. Joseph's. The weather was hot, and Sanna languid, so she was glad of Lydia's quiet companionship and help. She would have thought it high treason against friendship to have preferred, even secretly, Lydia's company to that of Rose, but there were times when the high spirits of the latter almost oppressed her, and Lydia's quiet ways seemed to suit her best.

"Oh, there you are with your everlasting dolls," said Rose one evening, as she came upon her two companions very comfortably established just outside the schoolroom door, engaged in their favourite manufacture.

Sanna was feeling unusually well, and she replied, "Oh, do join us, Rose; you make dolls' heads so much better than we do. See

we can't get this one right at all; it has gone wrong from the very beginning, isn't it a bad shape?"

Rose shouted at it in good-natured derision. "Leave the heads for me, what bunglers you are; but I can't come just directly,—worse luck!"

"Why not?" At this moment Harriet Bond came slowly up, looking very disconsolate.

"Harriet and I have our sums to do first." Harriet groaned.

"Sums after tea!" exclaimed Sanna and Lydia.

"Yes; and the provoking part of it is, that it's in consequence of what Harriet and I thought a great treat." Renewed groans from Harriet. "We went with Sister Ruth this morning down to Kirkminster to shop, (the greatest fun in the world) and when we came back, Sister Mabel copied out the bills for us to add up; and we bungled over them so, and were such a time, that she said she was shocked at our being such dunces, and as we had lost our morning school we must do two sums each, after tea, before we went to play; and there are these horrible sums waiting for us now in the schoolroom." Rose's manner of relating her troubles was so droll that neither Sanna nor Lydia could help laughing; but Harriet remarked in a lamentable voice that it was nothing to laugh at. "I've been looking at mine," said she, "and one of them begins, 'Eighteen yards of lace, at 12s. 3d. a yard.' As if I wanted to buy lace! and only think of any one giving 12s. 3d. a yard for such trumpery."

Sanna and Lydia laughed more than before, and Rose joined heartily in their merriment. "Come along," said she, drawing her arm through that of her reluctant companion, "you're better off than I am. I've got to buy 'Twenty-seven calf skins, at 3s. 9d. a skin'—buy them or sell them, I don't know which. I know I'd rather have the lace. Come along, Harrie, the sums won't add themselves up, and I don't suppose we shall be very long if we set to work with a will."

But it was exceedingly difficult to work with a will, when the sounds of mirth in the playground were so distinctly heard. Never had arithmetic appeared so odious before.

"I don't believe this sum is out of Sister's own head," observed Harriet at last, "I think it's one of those in the green arithmetic book; I shall just look and see if mine's right."

"Nonsense, Harrie," exclaimed Rose, stopping her hand, "you know you mustn't look, it would not be fair, it would not be true. Suppose Sister asked you if you'd looked, what would you say?"

"I'm not going to do anything unfair or untrue," replied Harriet pettishly. "I'm only just going to see if my sum is right; if

it isn't of course I shall do it over again." So Harriet looked into the book, and exclaimed, "Oh, dear, it's ever so wrong! How horrid!" And she sat down groaning more dismally than before. From time to time she consulted the book, and at length pushed aside her slate, saying, "There, if the book's right, that's right, now I shall go."

"But you've smudged the working so, no one can make it out," said Rose, looking at Harriet's calculations, "and Sister Mabel isn't content with a sum unless we show her how we've worked it."

"Oh, nonsense! Sister Mabel knows very well I understand how to work these sums," said Harriet.

"Then how was it you made so many mistakes at first?" asked Rose.

"Oh, I suppose I was in too great a hurry," and away ran Harriet.

"I believe she copied these figures straight from the book," thought Rose indignantly, as she looked at her companion's sum. "If she did she deserves to lose her red ribbon. What a shame!"

The book being open on the table, she reflected there would be no harm in just satisfying herself that her own calculations were correct. Great was her dismay at finding they were very wrong indeed. She rubbed out her figures and began again.

"Rose," called Lydia through the door, "Sanna will have to go in directly; can't you come and alter the doll's head? Haven't you done that sum yet? Harriet has been out ever so long."

Rose replied she was coming directly; but her attention was now completely astray, and the sum would not come right. She altered and altered with irritable haste, and at length the sums corresponded with the book, a result attained by simply copying down the figures. With the slate-cloth she effaced the faulty tell-tale working, and as she did so, the door opened and Sister Mabel appeared. Rose's cheeks flushed crimson, and in her agitation she dropped the arithmetic book she was holding in her hand.

Whilst she stooped to pick it up, Sister Mabel, observing nothing amiss, looked over the sum. "Why have you rubbed out the working?" she asked, "you know I always require the working left that I may see if you really understand your sum. Get me the green book off the shelf that I may see if your answer is right. How comes it on the table?" added she in a tone of displeasure, "I hope you have not been looking into it?"

"No, Sister," replied Rose faintly; and as the lie passed her lips she turned pale and sick.

Sister Mabel looked at her with surprise, and was on the point of *inquiring* the cause of her confusion, when Harriet came hastily

into the room. "Where are your sums?" the Sister inquired, looking with surprise from Rose's pale, agitated countenance, to Harriet's flushed cheeks and tearful eyes.

"Sister, I have not done them," exclaimed the latter, bursting into a passion of sobs.

"Not done them," repeated the Sister sternly, "and yet you were out at play!"

"I have done worse than that, much worse," replied the penitent girl. "I wanted to get out to play, and I was too impatient to do the sums properly, and I looked in the book and saw they were not right, and I just altered them by the book, and then I smudged over the working, Sister, that you mightn't see I'd done them all wrong, and then I went out to play." Harriet cried bitterly as she confessed her fault.

"And why have you come back now?" asked the Sister gravely.

"Because I couldn't play, Sister, I was so unhappy. I didn't know you were here; I came back to do the sums all over again, and I meant to tell you how deceitful I'd been when I took them up to you."

"I am glad, my child, you listened so quickly to the voice of conscience. You will not again, I hope, forget what I have so often told you, that an acted falsehood is as bad as a spoken lie."

"Sister, I did not forget that even when I did it," sobbed Harriet, "I knew I was doing wrong all the time; and besides, Rose warned me not to look into the book, and I answered her quite crossly."

Sister Mabel, thinking the presence of the arithmetic book, and Rose's distress were now completely accounted for, looked kindly on the latter, saying with a smile, "I am glad Rose 'recollected.'"

The smile, the words, the kindly tone pierced the child's heart, she could scarcely restrain herself from crying aloud with pain. Sister Mabel turned again to Harriet; "You must not return to the playground at all this evening; you will do these sums over again, and bring them to my room as soon as they are finished. Your punishment will be that you must lose your after-tea recreation until this day week, and employ the time in such tasks as I shall set for you."

"But you will forgive me, Sister?" asked Harriet anxiously.

"Yes, my love, you have proved your penitence by a free and full confession, and I trust will prove it further by turning your punishment into a penance."

"How, Sister?"

"A punishment is something painful imposed upon us for our faults against our will, and to which we are obliged to submit, how-

ever unwillingly, simply because we cannot help ourselves. Punishments do not necessarily make people better, though they may restrain them from committing the same fault again through dread of the consequences; but penance is an infliction for our sins to which we submit willingly, making it our own punishment on ourselves for our offences; or as St. Paul expresses it, revenging ourselves upon ourselves for having weakly and wickedly yielded to temptation. A punishment cheerfully borne, and thoroughly and heartily carried out, becomes a penance."

"Then mine shall be a penance, Sister," said Harriet eagerly, "for I'll work with all my heart."

As she raised her eyes humbly and imploringly to the Sister, the latter kissed her, and then turning to Rose observed, "Your sums are quite right, my dear, you may go; only remember another time to let me see all the working of them."

Rose curtseyed and left the room, hardly knowing what she did. She joined the doll-makers, who hailed her with delight, but scarcely heard anything they said to her, and, when Sanna was called in by Sister Mabel, astonished Lydia by taking a book and saying she was going to read at the end of the playground. In vain Lydia implored her to finish the doll's head, in vain her companions tried to tempt her to join their games, she shook herself clear of them all, and sat herself down alone, with an open book before her, too miserable even for tears.

The glow of the setting sun fell round her like a glory, but she felt no warmth, and saw no brightness; the soft air fanned her cheek, but brought her no refreshment; the song of skylarks resounded on all sides, but caused in her no gladness; the shadow of sin had fallen upon her, and light and joy seemed suddenly to have forsaken her. An hour ago how happy she had been, and now—she hid her face in her pinafore and moaned. How she envied Harriet, penitent and tearful, yet with unburdened conscience, hard at work at her sums. How she wished she had acted like her, but she told herself again and again she could not have done it then, and it was impossible now.

Why not "then" as well as Harriet?

Because she could not lower herself so before her companion who had praised her as her monitor—because she could not acknowledge such a fall after the high tone she had taken with Harriet—because after all her profession and virtuous indignation, she had fallen much lower in that she had added to the "acted falsehood" the "spoken lie."

Oh, that lie, she writhed as she thought of it. To think that *she, Rose Berger*, could have fallen so low \ and in a fortnight the

prizes would be distributed, and every one expected her to receive the monitor's ribbon. Should she confess her sin to Sister Mabel? she asked herself. What would be the result? perhaps she would lose her red ribbon which she had won back so carefully, and her place among her companions for ever, so she sighed to herself. But if she did not confess it, could she go about with this heavy conscience? this gnawing pain at her heart? oh, impossible, impossible, she moaned; and then arose another thought more startling still, how could she dare to approach the sacred feast to which all the confirmed girls in the orphanage were looking forward? how could she ever communicate again with this hateful sin upon her conscience? "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?" she wailed, and bowing her head upon her hands she wept the bitterest tears she had ever shed.

The longer Rose deferred her confession the more difficult, of course, it became. She drooped daily, her cheek grew pale, her eyes languid, she did not care to play, and work and lessons seemed equally burdensome to her. Of an evening when Harriet sat herself down with eager diligence to her punishment tasks Rose envied her, and turned away with sickening heart to mourn alone.

Sister Mabel observed her with concern. She imagined she was ill, called her up and examined her. Dr. Ashworth was consulted, and he prescribed for her; but the once bright laughter-loving Rose was gone; the aching pain that never left her heart was beyond the reach of medicine. The nearer drew the 8th of September the heavier grew her burden, and the more impossible seemed her confession. She could not bear to be petted as if she were ill, and yet she yearned, as she had never yearned before, for kindness.

So the days dragged wearily on till September came, and with it came Visiting Sunday. Visiting Sunday was the first Sunday in the month, and on it therefore, the confirmed girls made their communion. The evening before Rose pondered whether she should tell Sister Mabel that she did not wish to communicate. But then the Sister would perhaps ask her reasons, and Rose felt that she could not endure any questions. Should she say nothing, but remain behind when the other girls went up to the Altar? But that would be another deception, and she shuddered at the thought. What should she do? she asked herself. Her indisposition was no fancy now; her head ached and throbbed, and her hands were feverish.

"My dear child," said the Sister as she wished her good night, "you do not look well; does your head ache?"

"Yes, Sister."

"Poor child; well, if it is not better to-morrow, I think you had

better not get up with the others. You shall be called just in time for breakfast."

Rose's first sensation was one of relief. If she did not go to church with the rest, the difficulty about her Communion was solved for her. Her next was a longing to throw herself into the Sister's arms, and tell out all her grief. She hesitated at the door, should she tell? "It is too late," she said to herself, "I dare not now."

She awoke when the others rose in the morning, and watched them as they dressed. She saw the confirmed girls getting ready to go to that Feast from which her sin had shut her out, and when one of her companions called her in time for breakfast her pillow was wet with tears. The pity she met with on entering the school-room, and Sister Mabel's inquiries about her headache, oppressed her, Lydia's gleeful anticipation of her brother's visit was distasteful, the cheerfulness of her companions jarred upon her, she felt so completely unlike herself, that she longed to get away from every one and be entirely alone.

Lydia was well up now in all the proprieties of St. Mary's; so when, in the afternoon, the portress announced Mark's arrival she no longer flew off like a wild thing to meet him; but advancing with laughing eyes towards Sister Mabel asked leave with a most decorous curtsy, which she repeated at the door before springing into Mark's outstretched arms. The moment she felt herself in his strong grasp she lost no time in preferring her request. "Mark," said she, "I want to know if you will let me have some money. Oh, a great deal of money."

"Indeed!" replied he scornfully, "that's likely, isn't it, that I'd give you a 'deal of money!' How much do you want, and what's it for?"

"That you're not to know," said Lydia decidedly, "so you needn't waste time in asking. But I'll tell you how much I want. Just three and sixpence."

Mark held up his hands in pretended wonder and horror, and then, pulling his money out of his pocket, let his sister help herself. She looked so important and mysterious as she folded up the sum she had asked for in a piece of paper she had brought for the purpose, that he laughed at her exceedingly, but his various attempts to discover her secret were fruitless.

"Arn't you afraid to trust me with so much?" she asked, shaking her pocket with one hand, and pulling his whiskers with the other.

"Well, no, I don't know as I am," replied he, as if reflecting, "I suppose you're going to lay in something against the time I begin housekeeping."

"Housekeeping, ah," exclaimed Lydia, "and I'm to be your housekeeper, ain't I, Mark?"

"Well, we'll see," replied her brother; an evasive answer which recalled somewhat unpleasantly the conversation on this subject which had taken place last Christmas Eve; and for a moment a cloud rested on the little girl's happy face. It soon passed, however, driven away by a sting of remorse that she should wish Mark to be happy only in the way that would afford her most gratification. But she asked no questions as to his plans, and began to speak of orphanage news, and especially of the approaching 8th. She told him of Sanna's illness, and Rose's headache, and informed him that every one was sure that Charlotte, Rose, and Harriet would be made "blue ribbons." Then she explained what this meant, and entered fully into the subject of the ribbons.

"And why haven't you a red one?" was Mark's unexpected question, when she stopped for breath.

"Why, Mark, how silly! they're only given every 8th; and this will be only the second 8th I've been here."

"Well, mind you get one this time."

"Why, do you wish it very much, Mark?"

"Of course I do, didn't you say they was for good conduct?"

"Yes, but I don't think I shall get one this time."

"Why not?"

"Because I haven't been thinking at all about getting one, I've been thinking of nothing but you."

Mark hugged her, "But you haven't been doing nothing amiss, I hope."

"I don't think so; I believe my marks are good; but I haven't been thinking about the ribbon at all, only about pleasing you."

"But I suppose it ain't necessary to be always thinking about the ribbon to get it," observed Mark with another hug.

"Well, I don't know," replied Lydia, pondering, "those that expect it, are always thinking about it, I fancy; and fret if they think their marks are not good, and are in such a fright when the day comes for fear they shouldn't have it after all. At least so Rose told me, and Charlotte too, and they ought to know."

"Well, never you go and trouble about it like that," said Mark. "If it's a reward for good conduct just you never think about it at all, but only try to do your duty, and all you know is right; then if you're to have the reward why you'll have it; and if you don't get it, why it'll be because you haven't deserved it, and that would be the thing to fret for, Liddy, and not because you'd lost the prize. Do you see?"

Lydia said she did, and looked earnestly into her brother's eyes,

and stroked his cheek caressingly. "But you'd like me to get it?" she said.

"Ay, if you really deserved it. But I'd rather you deserved it and didn't get it, than got it and didn't deserve it."

Lydia turned this answer over and over in her mind, as she stood at the door a little while afterwards, watching her brother's departure. He paused as he reached the "great porch," and turning, waved his hand to her, and shouted, "Good-bye." The soft tones of her answering farewell were as pleasant music in his ear, as he entered the porch, passing through it to the chapel where he took his now accustomed place for evensong.

Lydia thoughtfully put on her bonnet. "He'd rather I deserved it and didn't get it, than got it and didn't deserve it. Then all I need think about is just to deserve it, I needn't worry about the ribbon at all. But if it would please him, oh, how I should like to get it!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COUNSEL.

SOON after dinner on this same visiting day, Sister Mabel had observed that the usually sprightly Rose was sitting apart, her arms folded on a desk in front of her, and her head resting on them.

The Sister approached her kindly. "I think I must send you into the infirmary," said she. "As Sanna is not honouring us with her presence to-day suppose you go and sit quietly with her, out of all this hum and bustle."

Rose was only too glad to do so, and soon presented herself before the Infirmarian, asking for Sanna.

"I have sent her to lie down," was the reply, "she is in the small west room. If she seems inclined to sleep do not disturb her. You look poorly yourself, what is the matter?"

Rose pleaded her headache.

"Ah, then you will be a nice quiet companion for her: am I not cruel?" said the Sister, smiling, and selecting a book from the infirmary library for Rose's entertainment, she dismissed her to seek her little friend.

Sanna was not asleep, and her face brightened when Rose entered.

"Oh, I am so glad you're come," she repeated two or three times, "I am so very glad. I heard you were poorly and couldn't

go to chapel this morning, so I knew you must have lost your Communion, and I was so sorry for you."

Rose winced at these words, and sat down by the bedside with her head a little averted. Sanna's next words were still less agreeable.

"But then there's the extra Communion on the 8th to look forward to."

Rose did not answer.

"I'm afraid your head aches very badly," continued Sanna, presently, "lean it against me, Rose, I can't bear you to be poorly."

"Not so poorly as you," said Rose, trying to smile.

"Ah, but I'm used to being poorly, and you're not. There lay your head down so; is that comfortable?"

"Very."

"Will it worry you if I talk?"

"No, I like it, but Sister Jane thought you had better be quiet."

"I can talk and be quiet too," said Sanna. "I want to tell you something. I have had a treat to-day,—a visitor."

"Indeed!" said Rose, looking up, "is your father come back then at last, Sanna?"

"Ah, no," said the little girl; she paused and sighed, then added, smiling, "no, not my own father, my own soldier father, and yet a father too."

"You don't mean Mr. Neville?" exclaimed Rose in a tone of wonder.

"Indeed I do," said Sanna, laughing at Rose's surprise.

"What in the world could he come to see you for? you're not really ill, Sanna, are you? you're only poorly, you'll soon be better; and besides, I did not know he ever came to visit in the infirmaries on Sundays."

Rose spoke with anxious volubility, the idea that Sanna was "really ill," something more than merely "poorly," frightened her.

"Yes, I am ill, really ill, Rose," replied Sanna, hesitating, "but Mr. Neville came to see me not because of that exactly, but because Sister Mabel had asked him if I might receive Holy Communion though I am not confirmed."

Rose stared. "How very odd! what did Mr. Neville say?"

"He said just what the Prayer Book says, that if I was ready, and wished to be confirmed very much, I might receive at once."

"But none of us have ever done so," replied Rose, "we have all waited till we have been confirmed."

"But the next confirmation will not be till the year after next, so I can't wait, you see."

"Not wait! why not? you are just the same age as Lydia, and she will wait: at least I suppose so."

"But I am dying, Rose."

For a moment Rose was speechless, and her heart seemed to stand still within her; then she answered almost angrily, "Nonsense, Sanna! That comes of your talking and tiring yourself. I have heard Sister Mabel say that when people are tired and poorly they often imagine all sorts of dismal things about themselves. Now I shan't talk to you any more; you try to go to sleep, and I'll read. I'm sure Sister Jane would say that was best."

Sanna laid her head submissively on the pillow, saying as she did so, as if to herself, "It's no imagination though of mine, and it's not because I'm tired. Sister Mabel told it me herself."

Again Rose felt that spasm of fear at her heart. "Dear Sanna," she urged, "think how unlikely it is. Why you don't even keep your bed."

"I don't think sick people always do," replied Sanna; "there are some people very ill in the long infirmary, but they don't keep their beds. One of them told me she hoped she should be able to get up to the last."

This rather upset Rose's theories of illness; but she replied eagerly, "That's nothing to do with it, Sanna; the people in the long infirmary are 'incurables,' so of course they're no rule; you're not an 'incurable,' you're one of us."

Rose seemed to think this argument unanswerable; but Sanna replied, "But an 'incurable' means a person who can't be cured; and Sister Mabel told me plainly that Dr. Ashworth says I cannot get well."

Rose felt too bewildered with dismay to speak, so after a short pause Sanna continued, "And Mr. Neville spoke to me quite plainly about death. I suppose he thinks it might come soon now, for he said my Communion need not be delayed; and he asked me, only think, Rose, whether I would not like to make my first on the 8th with all my dear companions and you, dear Rose. And I felt almost too happy to answer him."

She tried to draw her friend closer down to her, but Rose broke away with a smothered exclamation of grief, and walked to the window, where she stood looking out on the glowing landscape, without a thought of anything save the cold, dull misery that seemed to envelope her like a cloud. Oh, now indeed she felt in all its intensity the isolation of her heart caused by her sin, the utter separation that sin had caused between her dying companion and herself!

Sanna watched her with concern, but mistook altogether the cause of her grief.

"Don't look so, Rose! oh, please don't look like that: I wish I

had not told you ; I forgot it would grieve you ; I have got so accustomed to think about it, but it's all a surprise to you. Come back, dear Rose, come back, and sit upon my bed."

"Come back !" oh, how Rose longed to "come back !" to retrace her steps along that dreary fortnight which now stretched between her and her fall. Oh, if she could but live that time over again, but now, she said again and again to herself, it was "too late ;" and her tears burst forth at poor little Sanna's entreaties.

"I cannot come back to you," she sobbed at last, "I am not fit to be with you, Sanna. You are so good, and I am so wicked."

Sanna glided from her bed, and folding her arms round the weeping girl, nestled her cheek against hers, saying with a smile, "Ah, Rose darling, you little know how naughty I am, but I do know how good my Rose is, and I like to think that the last 8th I shall be here you will be made a 'child of Mary.'"

Rose almost pushed her away,—these words were worse than all beside,—and crossing the room she sat down on a bed, and cried aloud in her distress. Sanna would have followed her, but Rose waved her back, and the feeble little invalid sat down on the window-seat, scared and dismayed.

But presently Rose raised her head, wiped her eyes, and speaking deliberately and with a forced calmness said, "You'll never see me with a blue ribbon, Sanna ; I've lost my red ribbon again."

Sanna made no reply, but stared wonderingly at the red ribbon and glittering medal which shone on Rose's breast.

"I mean that I should lose it directly if Sister Mabel knew what I have done," added Rose, observing the direction of Sanna's glance.

"I don't suppose it's anything really very bad," suggested Sanna, in a half anxious, half coaxing voice ;—that Rose should not obtain the blue ribbon was bad enough, that she should again lose the one she already wore seemed to her intolerable. "Was it something you did this morning, Rose dear ? I suppose you haven't been able to get at Sister Mabel yet. It's always difficult on Sundays. But just now she's very likely at liberty, hadn't you better go and tell her at once, and have it off your mind, dear?"

Again Sanna advanced towards her friend, and again Rose put out her hand to keep her back, to the little girl's no small distress.

"Don't touch me, Sanna," cried Rose, "you don't know what I've done,—more than a fortnight ago I behaved most deceitfully, and when Sister questioned me about it, I told a downright lie. I said deliberately I hadn't done what I had done."

Then it was out,—her odious secret,—that she had been carrying about in her heart these many days. Though her tears burst forth afresh, there was real relief in them now ; she was no longer false

to Sanna at least,—that was a comfort. When at length she checked her sobs and looked up, she saw how great a shock this confession had been to her friend. Sanna was sitting on her bed with blanched cheeks and lips; and when Rose looked up at her, she turned aside, and burying her face in her pillow, cried quietly but very bitterly.

"Oh, Sanna, do speak to me," said poor Rose, approaching her humbly; "I am so unhappy, do say one word, and then I'll go down stairs. Oh, say you don't hate me."

The sick child raised herself, and clinging to her companion, sobbed out, "It's not that, Rose, you know how I love you, but I'm so—so—I hardly know what—so *disappointed*."

Yes, that was the sting. The girl she had believed in so fondly, and looked up to so admiringly, had proved herself unworthy of that almost worshipping admiration, and poor little Sanna felt the bitter heartache so many have writhed under besides her, of discovering that what she had imagined a precious jewel was but common glass after all. And when Rose, having broken the ice, poured out to her the whole tale of her sorrow, the child's grief redoubled as her disenchantment became more complete. She listened with bewilderment to the confession of how a first-class girl, and one almost a monitor, had stooped to an act of petty dissimulation which Sanna had only supposed possible in a "new girl," or a "very naughty one,"—some girl whose position in the school might be described as "nowhere." And then that deliberate falsehood! she felt cold at the very thought of it. Still her love for Rose remained, but its character became altogether changed. She was no longer the little dependent creature, clinging to her elder companion with all a younger sister's devotion, Rose's fall had made her, as it were, the elder, and as such Rose treated her, pouring out to her all her shame and sorrow, and appealing to her for counsel.

"Oh, Sanna, do help me, do advise me, what shall I do?"

Sanna thought this did not admit of a moment's doubt or hesitation. "Go at once to Sister Mabel," she urged, "this very minute, and tell her everything—everything—just as you have told me."

"Oh, if I had done so at once," sighed Rose, "it seems impossible now, she will be so angry."

"Of course she will," replied Sanna, decidedly, "but that can't be helped now, and the longer you put it off the worse it will be. You know you *must* tell, Rose, you can't go on hiding a sin in your heart, why it would make your whole life a lie." Wise little Sanna!

"Ah, yes; ah, yes," cried Rose, "but oh, the disgrace, the shame,—and to lose my red ribbon again; I shall never, never get it back again, I know."

"Never mind that," said the sick child stoutly, "wouldn't you rather not wear your ribbon than wear it knowing you had no right to it?"

Rose almost groaned.

"Besides," continued Sanna, "isn't one Communion worth all the shame and disgrace in the world if only God is pleased with us? and surely, Rose, He *is* pleased when we confess and are sorry for our sins. Don't you remember those texts, 'Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy,' and 'if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?' And then there's another text which says, 'there is a shame that bringeth glory,' and that must be the shame of owning we're wrong and saying we're sorry for it."

Rose stood up by her friend's bed as if preparing to start in search of Sister Mabel, but she hesitated still. "I'm *so* afraid," she said, "I never felt so afraid before."

"It's no use standing thinking about it," expostulated Sanna, "the more you think about it the worse it will seem; and you know it *must* be done,"—this was Sanna's strong point,—"so the sooner it's done the better. You can't keep on going about with a lie in your heart; you didn't dare go to Holy Communion this morning with it; and you won't dare—at least you oughtn't to dare—go to Holy Communion till you have confessed it, and made all the amends you can for it. And only think how dreadful for any one to be for a moment longer than they can help in such a state that they dare not receive the Blessed Sacrament."

Rose listened tearfully and wonderingly to her eager companion. Could this be the little shy silent child that seldom ventured an opinion upon anything, who now spoke in a tone of authority rarely used even by a senior monitor? Sanna's nearness to eternity, and the deep thoughts working in her mind respecting her own participation in the great Mystery of the Blessed Eucharist, had given her the simple wisdom and earnest courage, before which the elder, stronger, cleverer Rose yielded submissively. As she stooped to kiss her little friend she felt they two had completely changed positions. Sanna was now her elder, her monitor. "And I," thought Rose, as she prepared for her humiliating task, "am less than the newest girl in the orphanage."

She had pledged her word to Sanna that she would seek Sister Mabel at once, and had almost brought herself to wish to do so—"to have it over," as she expressed it to herself; nevertheless, it

was with a feeling of relief that she heard the chapel-bell ring for evensong as she entered the long cloister. Here was a respite, and that not of her seeking,—her word to Sanna was unbroken.

The latter also heard the chapel-bell, and heard it with regret; she dreaded every obstacle in the way of Rose's speedy confession. Sister Jane coming in to look after her little patient found her with flushed cheeks and feverish hands, and blamed herself exceedingly for having allowed Rose to stay so long.

"Has anything troubled you, my child?" she said presently, observing the anxious expression of Sanna's face, after she had laid her more comfortably on her bed, and given her some cooling drink. "Now don't begin to cry, or I must bar the door against all old friends: cheer up, little puss, tell me what it is that grieves you, perhaps we can talk it away."

"It is a secret, Sister dear, Rose's secret; you won't tell, will you, Sister?" said the tired child, longing for the relief of sympathy from one in whom she could trust.

"I will not tell anything you wish me not to," replied the Infirmary gravely, deeming an unconditional promise the best anodyne she could administer just then to her little patient.

"Thank you, dear Sister. Oh, Sister, Rose has done something very naughty,—very naughty indeed; you won't ask what it is, will you?" said Sanna imploringly, looking up in the Sister's face, who shook her head, and could scarcely repress a smile. "And she is gone to tell Sister Mabel," continued the child, greatly reassured, "but she hasn't gone quite willingly, and the chapel-bell has rung for service, and that will put it off; and I'm so afraid that as she can't tell Sister Mabel at once she'll go on putting it off, and perhaps never tell at all, for only think, Sister, she ought to have told a fortnight ago."

"That is a bad business, certainly," replied the Sister, "but if she has made up her mind to be true and honest now, depend upon it she will, my child. Now listen to me, do not fret. I will say a little prayer, here by your bedside, that Rose's present good resolution may be confirmed. Then rest in faith, dear child; and I promise you that without being at all inquisitive as to Rose's misdoings I will find out whether she has fulfilled your hope, and bring you word. Will that satisfy you, Sanna?"

Sanna lifted her face, now brightened with smiles, to the kind infirmary Sister; who first kissed her, and then kneeling by the bedside offered a simple earnest prayer that Rose might be strengthened and confirmed in her present penitence and good intention.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TAKING ADVICE.

BUT while little Sanna rested quietly in faith and hope, poor Rose's "respite" only added to her fear and dread; and after service it was with a very white face that she murmured an entreaty to Sister Mabel to speak to her alone.

"Go and wait for me in my room, I will come to you directly," was the answer.

"Poor child," thought the Sister, "she has found Sanna worse, I fear, and perhaps has just woke up to the knowledge that she cannot recover. I ought to have prepared her."

The same idea occurred to her companions. "How pale Rose looks, and her eyes are red with crying; Sanna must be much worse," they whispered one to the other.

In a little while Sister Mabel, looking very grave, opened her room door, and beckoned to Harriet. The latter, thinking only of Sanna, ran hastily to her call; Sister Mabel drawing her into the room again closed the door, and Harriet to her great surprise and concern saw Rose kneeling by a chair, on which she had hidden her face, weeping bitterly.

There was a brief silence, and Harriet looked from Sister Mabel's grave face to Rose's heaving shoulders in great perplexity.

At length the Sister spoke.

"Rose has something she wishes to say to you, Harriet," and she turned expectantly to Rose, who, however, did not speak.

"Shall I say it for you, Rose?" asked the Sister after another pause; and the kneeling girl signified by an imploring gesture her assent.

"Harriet," said Sister Mabel, "Rose wants me to tell you, that, when you were punished about a fortnight ago for the dishonest way in which you did your sum, she ought to have shared your punishment, for she did precisely the same thing herself."

Harriet looked wonderstruck. She could not but remember Rose's vehement protestations against her looking into the sum book; and she marvelled how it was that if Rose had really committed the same fault it had not been confessed at the same time that she had acknowledged hers.

This explanation was given by Rose herself. Now that Sister Mabel had broken the ice for her she was able to go on; and rising,

and facing her companion, she said humbly, but very firmly, "Harriet, I did indeed do just the same as you, when you had left the schoolroom; and when, afterwards, Sister Mabel asked me if I had looked at the book I told a downright lie, and said I hadn't."

Harriet stared at her in consternation. She could hardly have been more amazed had Sister Mabel herself confessed to telling a lie. But in another moment she sprang forward, and throwing her arms round her companion's neck, burst into tears, exclaiming, "Oh, Rose, dear Rose, I am so sorry, I am so very sorry."

"Ah, we must all be sorry," observed Sister Mabel; and she was proceeding to speak a few earnest words to both the children, when a tap came at her door. She went to open it, and there stood the kind Infirmarian, who in a few whispered words explained poor little Sanna's anxiety.

"If you will allow it," said Sister Mabel, "I will send Rose herself to explain to Sanna what has passed between her and me. That I think will best ease her mind, and she deserves this much, my Sister, for it is, I find, through her that any confession has been made at all."

Not a word of explanation could the girls elicit from Harriet when she issued from Sister Mabel's room at the summons of the tea-bell. She answered rather sharply that her visit to the Sister's room had nothing to do with Sanna, and was no business of theirs. So they came to the conclusion that Rose and Harriet were involved in some scrape; and on Miriam's overhearing some remarks to this effect, and observing thereupon that "in that case it would be very mean to be asking any questions, or spying, or prying," they acquiesced in her opinion, and left Harriet in peace.

Still some whisperings were kept up among them; and as Harriet sat silently apart after tea, apparently engaged with a book, and it transpired that Rose had again been allowed to go to Sanna, the whisperers decided that if anything had been done amiss by the two girls Harriet must have been the greater culprit, for to go to see Sanna was considered a privilege and treat. Once they whispered so loud that Harriet heard. She heard and rejoiced, and determined that by no word or look of hers should any of these busybodies guess the truth.

"Poor dear Rose," thought she, "I don't wonder at her shrinking from telling what she'd done. She was certain of the blue ribbon on the 8th; and to think of her, almost a monitor, telling a downright lie! one would have supposed she was only a new girl. But then to lose her ribbon again! oh, how she will feel it. What a dreadful disgrace; and if all the girls find out the reason

why, and I suppose they must, (but it shan't be through me!) she'll lose her place in the school for ever."

Absorbed in these dismal reflections, Harriet sat still with her book in her lap, till Rose returned from the infirmary. Then she went over to her and sitting down beside her whispered eagerly, touching her medal as she spoke.

"Sister Mabel hasn't taken away your medal, Rose?"

"Sister says Mr. Neville must decide about that; I am to see him to-morrow," replied Rose, sighing.

"Oh, dear, how dreadful! of course he'll take it away. How horrified he'll be!"

Rose thought so too: but feeling just now so sad she wished Harriet were not quite such a "Job's comforter."

Possibly Mr. Neville was "horrified" the next day, but he did not show it. He spoke very gravely, but did not even seem surprised. Indeed he told Rose that considering how eagerly she had, by her own showing, desired the blue ribbon, for its own sake, and for the little distinction and authority it would have given her among her companions, some such catastrophe as had actually happened was almost inevitable.

"For the moment we begin to work for a reward, Rose,—that reward being something which shall benefit only ourselves—that moment our work becomes selfish work, and selfish work is unholy work, my child; GOD will have nothing to do with it; His blessing does not rest upon it; He may let it alone and allow it to prosper, that is a great misfortune; and He may cause it to fail, and for that we should be very thankful. I, for one, am very glad you have lost your chance of the monitorship." Rose's dark eyes were fixed in amazement on the Chaplain's face. "Because, my child," he continued, answering her look, "it would have made you self-satisfied—proud—*selfish*; and when once persons become selfish, they not only never advance in spiritual things, but they are continually going back. Their consciences become numbed; they care for nothing but that which brings them advancement—notice—honour. They become their own idols; no wonder GOD lets them alone. As their love for themselves increases, the love of GOD dies out of their hearts; they may have been religious once, they may once have been almost, perhaps altogether, Saints; but as soon as they begin to work for any other motive than the mere desire to do their utmost for Him Who has done everything for them, that moment they not only cease to be Saints, but their religion begins to die out, and unless something happens to check them, startle and rouse them, they, in all probability, become open sinners, or self-deluding hypocrites."

1

"But you are not glad I have been wicked, sir?" asked Rose timidly. She could not quite understand Mr. Neville's satisfaction at her losing her chance of the monitorship.

"No, indeed, my child, but glad that you have proved how weak and wicked you may be, as soon as you begin to do right with the selfish motive of advancing yourself by your well-doing, instead of doing right because it is right, and therefore pleasing to God; and your best, because it is best, and therefore an acceptable offering to Him Who gave His very self for you. Do you know that hymn which begins,

'My God, I love Thee, not because
I hope for Heaven thereby?'"

Rose said she did.

"Remember, then," continued Mr. Neville, "that it is no high or noble religion which does right, even with the object of winning Heaven if it would win it only for self; it is a low religion which would avoid the pains of hell for self, or seek to enjoy the happiness of heaven for self; our care must be to desire Heaven, and aim at Heaven, because it would be such a grief, such a dishonour, to our dear LORD if we lost, through our own perverse will and folly, that which He has purchased for us by His own Blood as our Baptismal right. And if that which is in itself right becomes worthless if done with an aim that may be of the nature of religion, but is a low, selfish sort of religion, how much more worthless do actions, good in themselves, become, if performed with the miserable, utterly despicable motive of exalting ourselves above others, of gratifying our own wretched vanity by obtaining praise and notice. Do you understand me, Rose?"

"Yes, sir," murmured Rose.

"Who can wonder that persons blinded by vanity and selfishness, ambitious only of self-advancement, should fall into all manner of unexpected snares and sins they once thought impossible? Lying for instance."

The hot tears rolled down Rose's face.

"What punishment has Sister Mabel given you?" asked the Chaplain.

Rose explained falteringly that she was to have the same that had been awarded to Harriet, only hers was to last a fortnight instead of a week; and, (here Rose almost broke down, for this part of her punishment seemed to her a very serious affliction) although she might be present on the 8th at the service, and distribution of prizes, she was immediately after the latter to betake herself to St. Joseph's, and make herself generally useful there for the rest of the

day, so that she would miss all the sport and pleasure of that happy holiday.

"A very suitable punishment," remarked the Chaplain, "now then, I am going to appoint you a penance which shall last as long as the punishment. Do you know the difference between penance and punishment?"

Rose tried to recall Sister Mabel's explanation to Harriet of the difference between the two, and replied, "Punishment, sir, is something painful put upon us by others, to make us sorry for what we've done wrong; and penance is something painful we undertake ourselves, to show we're sorry?" Rose finished her sentence in an interrogative tone, for she did not feel quite certain that she had given Sister Mabel's explanation accurately.

"I would rather say that penance is some act of self-discipline willingly undertaken to make us remember where we have failed, and to help us to gain the victory another time," said Mr. Neville. "And penance need not, by any means, be necessarily painful. I should be very sorry if you thought that which I am going to appoint you, 'painful;' I would rather you found it a pleasure."

Rose brightened exceedingly, but looked surprised.

"I wish you every morning to say over with your usual morning prayers that hymn I alluded to just now, 'My GOD, I love Thee;' and after school at mid-day to go into the oratory, and repeat very slowly and deliberately, upon your knees, the 139th Psalm. When you say the hymn, fix your mind on the thought that, every action is valueless that does not spring from the love of God, and that is not free from love of self. And when you say the Psalm, try to realise the *fact* that all your actions are seen of God, and all the motives of those actions known to Him; and that however much praise and reward we may receive on earth for apparently good works, no action is acceptable to Him that is not pure in its motive; pure from vanity; pure from pride; pure from conceit; from love of praise and esteem; from love of power, authority, and place; in short, pure from self. And this I wish you to do during the fortnight your punishment is to last. Do you think you will find it 'painful?'"

"Oh, no, sir."

"But remember this. Unless the hymn and the Psalm are repeated slowly and thoughtfully, and with the intention and object I have mentioned, you will have performed no penance. The mere repeating them as a form, or as a simple act of obedience to me, will be utterly useless, a mere waste of time. You might as well rattle a handful of peas in a bottle. You must undertake this willingly, earnestly, as a reasonable and reasoning being, with the ex-

press purpose of obtaining a higher aim, nobler motives of action for the future, and also more *recollection*."

Rose looked up at this well-known word, and then down again with tearful eyes at her ribbon and medal which she had taken off and now held in her hand.

"Has Sister Mabel deprived you of your medal?" asked Mr. Neville.

"Sir," replied Rose, almost choking with apprehension, "Sister said you would decide about that."

The Chaplain took the medal, and looked at it. "Then I decide you shall keep it and wear it still; not now, my child, as a badge of distinction, but as one of humiliation. I mean," he continued, as he passed the ribbon round her neck, "that when you wear it now, you should remember, that you are the very least, and last, and lowest of all who wear this badge, that you have really forfeited it, and, strictly speaking, have no business with it. Let that thought keep you humble, my child. And, moreover, read your motto," he added, holding the medal in his hand.

Rose read, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"Wear it, remembering this great truth: only they who are pure in heart, pure in motive, pure in intention, pure in thought, can see God in all the events of daily life; only they can see His Hand leading and guiding them; only they can enjoy His perpetual presence. And one thing more, my child. Remember: those are not 'pure in heart' who hide away their sins, and keep them secret, festering and cankering in their souls. We do not clean a room by hiding the dirt away in a corner, and then trying to forget it is there, eh, Rose?"

"No, sir," replied the little housemaid, and a smile sparkled through the tears in her bright eyes.

"Let the unhappiness of the last fortnight, and the loss of yesterday's Communion, (only think if it had been your last opportunity, my child!) keep this remembrance in your mind. Never let a sin settle again, off with it, out with it, as you would cast out a noxious reptile."

Rose lingered on her knees after the Chaplain had given her God's blessing, and looked up wistfully in his face. One thing she had not clearly understood. "My Communion, sir, may I make my Communion on the 8th, with the rest,—with Sanna?"

"Most certainly, my child," said Mr. Neville. "There seek for grace, for help, for strength against all your temptations; there seek to be made, like Blessed Mary, the pure-intentioned, self-devoted 'handmaid of the LORD.'"

I subjoin the Hymn which formed part of Rose's "penance," in case any among my readers should be unacquainted with it.

"My God, I love Thee, not because
I hope for Heaven thereby,
Nor yet because who love Thee not
Must burn eternally.

Thou, O my SAVIOUR, Thou didst me
Upon the Cross embrace;
For me didst bear the nails, and spear,
And manifold disgrace,

And griefs and torments numberless,
And sweat of agony;
Yea, death itself; and all for me
Who was Thine enemy.

Then why, O Blessed JESU CHRIST,
Should I not love Thee well?
Not for the hope of winning Heaven,
Nor of escaping hell;

Not with the hope of gaining aught,
Not seeking a reward;
But as Thyself hast loved me,
O, ever-loving LORD.

So would I love Thee, dearest LORD,
And in Thy praise will sing;
Solely because Thou art my God,
And my Eternal King. Amen."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ANOTHER 8TH.

SANNA was carried to the chapel on the morning of the "8th," and made her first Communion with those dear friends and companions she was so soon to leave. She was placed on her bed afterwards to rest, and lay quite still in a waking dream of happiness. After a while Sister Jane came in to beg her to sleep if she could, that she might be quite refreshed by the time the distribution of prizes began; Dr. Ashworth having given her leave to be present.

The day was delightfully warm, and Sister Jane, throwing a light covering over her little charge, opened the window, that the sweet

morning air might blow in upon her. "You have nothing to do but to rest," said she. "When it is time to make you smart I shall send in your lunch by the new infirmiry Sister, who will put on your frock for you, and make you 'charming.'"

Sanna smiled her thanks, but could not help wishing that her toilet were to be performed by any one rather than a "new" Sister. She was always shy, and more so than ever now she was ill; new faces distressed her.

The fear of her new attendant, however, did not keep her awake; she fell into a refreshing slumber, and woke up at last to see the "new Sister" enter the room with the lunch. Raising herself on her elbow, she rubbed her eyes to be sure she was quite awake, and exclaimed doubtfully, "Carrie! is that really you?"

"Yes, really me," said Carrie, putting down the tray; and, half laughing, half crying, (for the change in her little companion's appearance since she had last seen her affected her deeply) she knelt down by the bedside, and folded the child in her arms, covering her face with kisses.

"How nice, how very nice you look," said Sanna admiringly; "but I didn't know you had been actually received."

"Only yesterday," replied Carrie, "and I am come to my new work to-day for the first time; I am to help every morning in the infirmaries."

"Oh, how glad, how glad I am!" exclaimed Sanna, "and I was quite sorry when Sister Jane said the 'new infirmiry Sister' was to bring me my lunch; I don't like new people, you know, Carrie."

"Ah, Sister Jane thought she would give you a little surprise; she told me you did not know I was here. But are you not going to take this nice lunch before it gets quite cold?"

Sanna sat up to take it, but could scarcely eat her broth for looking at Carrie. "But dear me!" said she presently, "I have been calling you Carrie all this time, and I ought to have said Sister Caroline."

"Of course you ought," replied the young Novice; and then they both laughed.

Sister Caroline was a very dexterous waiting maid, she dressed the invalid so quietly and skilfully that she felt little or no fatigue; and, as she arranged her red ribbon for her, Sanna said, "Carrie—I mean Sister Caroline—I know I shall never remember!"

"Suppose you say 'Sister Carrie,'" suggested the Sister by way of compromise.

"Yes, that would be easier. Dear Sister Carrie, do you know that Rose will not have the blue ribbon?"

Sister Caroline did not know, and was very sorry to hear it;

but she would not allow any lamentations on Sanna's part, and stoutly maintained that no doubt Rose would be much better without it.

Sanna could scarcely agree to this, but Carrie declared it was against rule to dwell upon troubles on the 8th. "Ribbons or no ribbons we are all going to enjoy ourselves, to-day," said she cheerily; "I know I am for one, for I have had leave to spend the day at the orphanage, and, only think, to take my place as an 'old blue ribbon.'"

Sanna clapped her hands for joy, and was soon afterwards carried down stairs by Sister Jane, and placed in a little couch prepared expressly for her by the side of Sister Ruth.

The entrance of Sister Caroline as an old blue ribbon, was hailed by the children with irrepressible delight; but as all the notabilities were in their places, no greetings could as yet be interchanged. She sat down on the bench appropriated to the old blue ribbons, just behind Sanna's couch, and the business of distribution began.

We are not going to repeat any description of the proceedings on this, or any other 8th; they were always conducted on the same plan. Suffice it now to say that this time Lydia carried off one of the regular prizes for needlework; and that no one but herself was surprised at her receiving, also, a red ribbon with the St. Joseph medal. She could scarcely believe her good fortune, and trembled and cried for sheer joy. "I did want it so, but not for myself," she whispered to Sister Ruth, as she returned to her place by her side, and received her congratulations, "I longed for it for Mark, he wanted me to have it, and I never thought I should get it. Oh, how glad Mark will be!"

Only two blue ribbons were displayed, and these caused some speculation among the children. That Charlotte would have one of these nobody doubted; and the hearty applause which greeted her as she received it, gladdened Sister Mabel's heart, and contrasted forcibly with the cold indifference which had been the poor girl's portion the year before.

But who was to have the other? As Mr. Neville took it in his hand, Rose's eyes were fixed on the floor; she could not bear her companions' gaze, for she knew they still thought it would be hers, and a vague hope sprang up in Harriet's heart, that perhaps she, Harriet, was to have it after all.

Every one was taken by surprise when Mr. Neville advanced to Sanna's couch, and with a few kind, earnest words, and a hearty blessing, gave the sick child the much coveted badge and enrolled her among "the Children of Mary."

On recovering from their surprise, the children burst forth in

such noisy congratulation, that Sister Jane, who was present, longed to get her patient speedily back to the little west dormitory.

As soon as the assembly broke up she advanced to Sanna, but Rose had anticipated her, and Sister Jane had not the heart to separate these two sisters in love, fast clasped in each other's arms.

"Dear Sanna," whispered Rose as her tears fell fast on her friend's face, "I am so glad you have the medal; that you are a 'Child of Mary.'"

"It will be yours next year, Rose darling," returned the little girl, clinging to her neck, "I know, I am sure it will; perhaps this very one."

As Rose began to sob, Sister Jane gently interfered, and finally carried off the new-made monitor. Sanna looked so exhausted when she reached the infirmary that Sister Jane quietly undressed her, put her into bed, darkened the room, and was leaving it, when the little girl faintly called her back.

"My ribbon and medal, Sister dear, let me wear them," she said imploringly. The Sister took them from the cross at the bed's head where she had hung them, and passed the ribbon round the sick child's neck.

Sanna's hands closed eagerly on the medal, and pressing it to her heart, as her head sank wearily on her pillow, she murmured, as if to herself, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MISS MARY'S NEWS.

AMONGST the guests at St. Mary's assembled to witness the distribution of prizes, were Mrs. Elsworthy, and her two eldest daughters. Mrs. Elsworthy's motherly heart was greatly touched by the appearance of little Sanna; no one could look at her and not perceive that her sickness "was unto death;" she had watched, moreover, with much interest the long lingering embrace between Rose and the little monitor, and was now listening with moistened eyes to the Superior's observations on the love between these two girls, and to her history of little Sanna given in answer to her inquiries respecting her.

Mrs. Neville always took great interest in the children at St. Mary's, and never missed an opportunity of being present at any of

their little galas if she could help it. Feeling unusually well this balmy morning, she had insisted on coming to the distribution in spite of her daughter's remonstrances, and was too much interested in the conversation between Mrs. Elsworthy and the Superior, to pay the slightest attention to Mary's hints that if she did not return at once, her dinner would be spoilt and Davis in despair.

Finding her mother quite callous to these misfortunes Mary joined Sister Mabel, and inquired why, and whither, Rose had disappeared.

The Sister explained that she was under banishment at St. Joseph's, adding, "Do not ask 'why,' dear Mary, she has disgraced herself, that is enough."

"I will not ask, indeed," replied Mary, "I should be sorry if any one inquired into my misdoings. But I am sorry, very sorry; an 8th without Rose seems quite an anomaly. Sanna ill, Rose in disgrace, and you tired out, dear Sister—at least you look so—why the edge will be off the Festival, I fear."

"I am not tired," replied Sister Mabel, her face brightening at once into a smile, "I am only very cross."

"Cross!" exclaimed Mary looking into the Sister's eyes which sparkled with secret laughter, "of course you are, you have all the appearance of it, you look quite savage, I assure you!"

"Then you had better be off, or you may come in for some of my anger, it will be terrible when it does fall, I assure you."

"I do not doubt it; but I cannot be off yet, because mamma is so ungrateful to me for my kindness in allowing her to come at all to-day, that she absolutely declines going home till she herself pleases; and there is the loveliest partridge that ever you saw shrivelling to a cinder on account of her delay. Am I not tried?"

"Grievously, I confess I wish you were at home looking after the partridge."

"What shall I do to keep you in tolerable good humour till mamma leaves off gossiping with Mrs. Elsworthy? It is unkind of you to shake me off, for I have something to tell you that will interest you very much. I had better tell you now, because when once I get mamma home I shall not like to leave her to her own devices, she is not to be trusted, and this is a great secret."

"Are you going to tell it me because you cannot keep it yourself?"

"Partly: you are a very spring-lock chest for secrets. They may go in, but they never come out!"

"Thank you for the compliment; I am sorry I cannot return it."

"You evil-disposed Sister! what unkind remarks you are making! Indeed, you do not deserve to hear my news, and I *know* it

will interest you. It is about Lydia's brother, my pupil, Mark Staunton."

"Yes," said the Sister in a tone of suddenly awakened interest, "what of him?"

"Ha, ha! I thought I should gain your ear at last," said Mary, laughing mischievously, "now I have a good mind to take my revenge, and go off to the partridge without telling you."

"I have no fear of that, it would be too great a disappointment to yourself. But, my dear, if you mean to tell me you had better do it at once, for the refectory-bell will ring in five minutes."

Thus stimulated Mary came to the point, and announced that the previous Sunday Mark had returned to the Chaplain's house after evensong, an unprecedented act on his part, and had then and there "offered his hand and heart," so Mary expressed it, to Emma, Mrs. Neville's maid.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Sister Mabel, quite as much interested as Mary could wish; and she turned and looked at Lydia, adding, "I wonder how that little thing will take it. Of course she will go to live with him when he has a house of his own."

"But, my dear Sister," said Mary eagerly, "it is at present a most profound secret; it is not even to be whispered in the air for fear it should come to Lydia's ears. Mark has set his heart on telling her himself next visiting day."

"Why did not the goose make his offer in the morning, and tell Lydia in the afternoon?" said Sister Mabel; "The idea of this being kept a secret for a whole month! Of course it will ooze out somehow long before that."

"I fancy the 'goose' had not accumulated sufficient courage till it came to the point of going back to Lowton in uncertainty," said Mary. "It was rather terrible for him; because, you see, he had to propose to mamma and Davis, as it were, as well as to Emma: it was tantamount to making three offers instead of one."

"And I suppose poor Emma made you her confidante, and this is the way you betray her confidence," laughed Sister Mabel.

"No, indeed. I was told this as a great secret by that model of discretion, the reverend papa himself."

"Oh, he was the confidant."

"Mark told him, and Emma came crying and wringing her hands to tell mamma; and then, I believe, that, with the exception of myself, every one, mamma included, went down on their knees to tell Davis."

"And how did Davis take it?"

"Surprisingly. Fortunately she was, after a motherly fashion of her own, in love with Mark herself. My belief is that Davis has

accumulated a vast fortune which she keeps hidden away somewhere in an old stocking, and that she has privately adopted Mark, and intends to make him her heir."

"Indeed, what luck for Mark! And how came you to be admitted into this great secret?"

"Why, after mamma had helped Emma to obtain Davis's consent, she began to repent, I suppose, of her good offices. It suddenly occurred to her, that Emma's marrying Mark implied her leaving us, that she could not be Mark's wife and our maid at the same time. So she broke out into lamentations over her impending loss, and attacked papa as a matchmaker, saying it was all his fault. So, of course, he appealed to me for protection."

"My dear Mary, what next!" exclaimed the scandalised Sister.

"Oh, papa always comes to me for protection when he is attacked by mamma and Davis. But this time we had no difficulty in extinguishing mamma, as Davis, for once, was on our side. And on the whole, you see, she bears it, now, remarkably well. But you will keep this news a secret, won't you, Sister?"

The refectory-bell rang before Sister Mabel had ceased laughing. She shook her finger menacingly at Mary, and went off in haste to marshal her guests to dinner, the 'old blue ribbons' having mustered in strong force; and the priest's daughter ran to take leave of the Elsworthys, and to impress on her mother the necessity of saving the partridge from its impending fate.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Neville, "I had no idea it was so late, and there they are all going in to dinner, and I had so wished to have seen Sister Mabel, to tell her about this marriage of Lydia's brother."

"Oh, I have done all that, mother," said Mary coolly.

"You have, you chatterbox! but it was to be told as a secret. Mark made such a point of telling his sister himself."

"So I told Sister Mabel," said Mary, "Lydia will not hear it from her. I'll back Sister Mabel to keep a secret against papa, or any other confessor in the world."

"My dear Mary!" said Mrs. Neville reprovingly.

"The partridge, mother, how black it must be by this time," suggested her daughter.

"I am glad of it," replied Mrs. Neville. "I wish I were to have anything else for dinner. That miserable bird! I am quite tired of hearing of it."

"And Mr. Arthur Elsworthy brought it down himself on purpose for you!" exclaimed Mary reproachfully, holding up her hands, "oh, mother!"

"Dear, dear, I retract, I recant," said Mrs. Neville; "here give

me your arm, my love! let us hasten to the rescue of this precious bird. I am bound to declare it delicious, though it should turn out a cinder indeed."

CHAPTER XL.

SISTER MABEL'S PROTEST.

MARY returned later in the day; Mrs. Neville having insisted that there was no occasion for her to remain in attendance on her; and Davis having remarked somewhat grimly that "Miss Mary seemed to think that no one could attend on the mistress but herself." Whereupon Miss Mary made a face at Davis, and, nothing loth, returned to the orphanage.

She found a very merry party assembled in the playground. Some girls had, as usual, gone for a walk; but the others were at high games; and here and there little groups of talkers paced up and down, conversing earnestly with their arms round each other's waists. Miss Neville's return not having been expected, no one noticed her entrance into the playground. Amused by the scene before her, she climbed the bank, and, sitting down on the top of it, laughed heartily at the pranks that were being played. After awhile she turned her attention to the talkers. Sister Caroline was walking up and down, looking rather lackadaisical,—a tall, somewhat old-young lady, an Associate, hanging on her arm, and speaking to her with great earnestness, and with (as it appeared to Mary) many expressions of endearment.

"I wonder what manner of rubbish Miss Boothby is saying to Carrie," was her somewhat contemptuous thought.

Then came by another group. Several 'old blue ribbons,' with a stout and very elegantly dressed lady in the midst. Mary recognised her as Lady Honoria Singleton, who had driven down to the orphanage that morning in a beautiful pony phaeton, with two outriders. This splendid person glittered with costly ornaments, her hair and dress were in the very extreme of the fashion, but on her head she wore the little plain close cap of the Associates of St. Mary's, which, in conjunction with her gorgeous attire, and befrizzled hair, made her look not unlike a wealthy lunatic just escaped from her nurse. Four or five girls surrounded her, with whom she seemed vastly popular. She walked with an arm round the waist of one—who on her part encircled, in like manner, the

waist of the Lady Honoria,—with the other hand she played caressingly with first one girl, and then another. Mary recognised one of these as a very honest good girl, kitchen maid in a family near Kirkminster, another as an under-nurse from town, a third as a dressmaker's apprentice; but from the 'hail-fellow-well-met' tone of the whole party one would have supposed them all earls' daughters as well as the Lady Honoria.

Mary watched them thoughtfully for some time; then rising suddenly from her seat with an emphatic "bah!" she rushed across the playground and caught Sister Mabel just taking leave of two or three 'old blue ribbons' at the door.

There was the same tired look on Sister Mabel's face which had before attracted Mary's attention; but she smiled her welcome to the young girl, and pressed her arm affectionately as she drew it under hers, "How is your temper, Sister?" said Mary roguishly.

"Very bad indeed," was the reply.

"So is mine," said Mary; "have you seen Lady Honoria, dear Sister?"

"Have I not!" exclaimed the Sister, holding up her hands; "and then people wonder that girls from orphanages turn out pert and forward! My dear Mary, I am just now in the same frame of mind as that Spaniard, whoever he was, when he said, 'Deliver me from my friends, and I will defend myself against my enemies.'"

It was very unfeeling of Mary to laugh, but she did laugh exceedingly. Sister Mabel's next remark however stopped her suddenly, "And I am very angry with you, Mary; yes, you may look; but I am really, very angry indeed."

"My darling Sister, what can I have done?" asked Mary in great concern.

"Why did you let Sister Caroline address you so familiarly to-day, before dinner I mean? I noticed she never once said, 'Ma'am,'—such a thing never happened before when she was monitor here."

"I remember I noticed it at the time," replied Mary, "but 'why did I let her?' let me see; I don't know how I could have helped it; you see now she is a 'Sister.'"

"Do you mean that when a girl becomes a 'Sister' she rises a step on the world's ladder? If Sister Caroline had remained 'Carrie Saunders' she would by this time have been somebody's nurse or housemaid; has she risen above that by becoming a serving Sister at St. Mary's?"

"Well, I don't know," said Mary pondering, "I think all the Associates believe so."

"Then the Associates are very ridiculous people."

"Very likely," said Mary drily. "I can well imagine the unutterable nonsense that Miss Boothby is at this moment talking to Sister Caroline. I overheard a little of it this morning. If Carrie does not think herself a ready-made saint before the end of the day it will not be Miss Boothby's fault."

Sister Mabel absolutely groaned.

"I heard Sister Bertha telling the Mother yesterday," continued Mary, "that Miss Boothby and old Mrs. Perry—that widow lady who has been staying at the mother house—and one or two other Associates made her quite nervous. She had to go in and out of the Associates' room very often; and each time she entered, up they all jumped, old Mrs. Perry and all, and remained standing the whole time she was in the room, for she was far too frightened to beg them to sit down; and the end of it was that at last she was so flustered that she dropped one of those pretty Parian vases she had taken down to fill with flowers, and broke it all to pieces."

"Poor dear Sister Bertha, I hope she was not blamed for carelessness."

"Oh no, the Mother laughed at her," said Mary, "and told her she supposed Mrs. Perry and Miss Boothby took her for a mitred Abbess of olden times, with a princely appanage, and a seat in Parliament in right of her abbacy. But Sister Bertha did not see the joke, and almost cried."

"No wonder," observed Sister Mabel; "I can imagine how such senseless homage would disgust so true a Religious as Sister Bertha. And yet these good silly women mean well of course."

"Oh yes," said Mary, "I know their argument is that the Religious habit confers a sort of—what shall I call it?—sacred dignity, quite irrespective of worldly rank; and so that very silly Miss Boothby,—Botherby I call her—and that simple-minded, kind old Mrs. Perry, think they are performing quite a religious duty, I believe, by standing in Sister Bertha's presence."

Again Sister Mabel groaned. "Let us write over all the doors at St. Mary's," said she, "'Deliver us from our friends, and we will defend ourselves against our enemies.'"

Mary laughed. "I don't know why you should mind this so much, dear Sister; after all it is a very harmless absurdity, a very innocent delusion on the part of these good people; it is a fault on the right side at all events. Mrs. Perry's homage is but a fair counterpoise to all the horrid abuse St. Mary's gets from the 'Amalgamated Protestants.'"

"My dear Mary," replied Sister Mabel very earnestly, so earnestly that the tears stood in her eyes as she spoke; "we have nothing to fear from the 'Amalgamated Protestants;' we

are quite safe as long as we have nothing to encounter but their falsehoods and abuse. Remember Who it is that says, 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say *all manner of evil against you falsely* for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.' Their misrepresentations keep us watchful, lest we should inadvertently give them occasion to blaspheme; their contempt keeps us humble, and, best of all, deters those from joining us who have not the one true motive in their hearts. *They* are not our real enemies—not the enemies, that is, whom we should fear. Our worst foes are that, now numerous, class with whom we have become *the fashion*—who cajole us, and quote us, and puff us, who curtsy to us as if we were princesses, who speak of us as if we were Saints, and, in fact, do all they can to petrify us into that state of living death—*Pharisaism*."

Mary was startled by the Sister's earnestness. She pondered a moment, and then observed, "I can imagine this to be very annoying and repulsive, still I don't see how these people are 'enemies;' what precise harm they can do; there is not much danger of your being turned into a Pharisee, I should think, Sister dear."

"Don't be too sure of that. We should be safer, perhaps, if we were 'contemplatives,' and lived as recluses; but belonging to an active order, we are necessarily in our work brought into frequent contact with the outer world. As long as that world snubs us, underrates our work, and criticises our every action, we may feel discouraged, perhaps; low-spirited even; sad at heart; but we are safe, quite safe; we are treading in the prints of our Master's footsteps; our work is 'all for love, and nothing for reward,' it is pure work, therefore, and will stand. But when once that world blows a trumpet before us, recognises our habit as conferring social distinction, and is always telling us what self-denying, noble-hearted creatures we are, why what woman is strong enough to stand unsathed against the deteriorating influence of such soul-destroying adulation? Some may stand longer than others, but very, very few, if any, will escape altogether unharmed."

Mary looked very serious.

"As to Miss Boothby's and Mrs. Perry's bowings and scrapings being 'harmless,' just look, dear Mary, at the practical results of such toadyism," continued Sister Mabel, "and you will see that nothing is more calculated to eat out, like a canker, the religious heart of a community. Take the case of a girl like Carrie Saunders, for instance. See how this delusion, which you think so 'harmless,' is likely to affect our Lay Sisters. Had Carrie gone to service, for which she was well fitted, she would have soon acquired a good

standing as a really valuable servant; she could have commanded good wages; and as she is very nice looking, might have ended by establishing herself very comfortably by marriage. Instead of this, she voluntarily adopts the life of a Lay Sister. Now observe; the *religious idea* of this life is that she renounces a life of comparative independence, the power of earning, perhaps, considerable wages, the chances of a happy marriage, and a home of her own, to work *as a servant*, yet without wages, without advancement, in strict obedience, and with but little to vary the monotony of daily routine; and this for the simple love of Him Who took upon Him the form of a servant for her sake; in short, that it is a sacrifice of all which she has it in her power to give;—an offering of love for love's sake at the foot of the Cross. I want you particularly to notice, Mary, that if this idea is carried out, it is a step down the social ladder, not a step up it; a voluntary descent from an acknowledged social standing, to the position of virtual nonentity.

"That is the theory—pure and simple; now let us see its practical results when muddled and marred by well-intentioned simpletons. The very day after Carrie has declared with her lips that she would rather be 'poor and lowly and despised with CHRIST, than dwell in the world and follow its maxims,' Miss Boothby meets her as an equal, flatters her, talks sentimental twaddle to her, and Carrie suddenly finds that the step she has taken is supposed to have raised her to an equality with a lady, on whom she might, but for this, be waiting as her maid, making her bed, darning her stockings, and in whose presence she would scarcely dare to sit down unbidden. Is it wonderful that our poor little novice loses her head, and begins to fancy she is a person of mark in the world after all? that she meets you as an equal? that she imagines she is something altogether out of the common way, and looks out for her meed of incense and flattery, makes up her mind she is a ready-made saint, and ends in becoming an insufferable nuisance?"

"Oh, Sister, Sister," remonstrated Mary, laughing.

But Sister Mabel went on, "If this state of things is not put an end to, the result will be that every girl who is too lazy, or too proud for service, will become a Lay Sister, by way of improving her worldly position. And if the religious habit is to be an object of homage, instead of an evidence that the wearer has renounced place, position, and social standing, why, our Sisterhoods will soon become genteel boarding houses for unmarried women, as too many foreign convents are at the present day;—or worse, asylums for persons having *no* position in the world—too proud to be looked down upon, too idle, or stupid, or inert, to battle with *the world*; discontented governesses, slighted old maids, ambitious

women, crippled by small means; these will assume the religious habit, will persuade themselves that by so doing they have put on some holy distinction with their clothes; and will bask in the adoration of the Boothbys and Lady Honorias of the world."

"But you wouldn't shut out any one from a Sisterhood because she was poor, or not of good family," said Mary, a little puzzled.

"No, no, dear girl; but I earnestly protest against any one supposing that she is in a better position as respects the world in a Sisterhood than out of it. I would have it understood—and that thoroughly—that we drop our worldly rank on entering it, and do not take up a rank we never had before. We are all equal. But it is because the titled lady descends to the level of her humble Sister, *not* because the humble Sister rises to the rank of the titled lady."

"But, Sister dear, in Sisterhoods, here at St. Mary's especially, there is so much 'homage' as you call it—I suppose I should say 'etiquette.' I mean that if the Superior entered the schoolroom at this moment you yourself would rise, and, by the way, I doubt whether, if you went to her room, you would sit down till she offered you a chair."

"That is a totally different case. I was speaking of our relationship to the world without, not of our discipline among ourselves. Your own sense must tell you that when a large body of persons live in community, unless there is strict subordination to authority and an exact discipline, they would soon be in utter confusion, and the house a bear-garden. But we bow to our Superiors as to properly constituted officers among ourselves. The same rule, the same exact observance of *official* rank, prevails in the army. No large body could exist without it. But because an ensign is on the strictest Ps and Qs with his colonel, it does not follow that the ensign's relations, or any one else in the world beyond the regiment, need be on Ps and Qs with the colonel too. And so in Sisterhoods. We show due respect and subordination to our Superiors, but their superiority does not extend beyond *us*. Do you not see? It cannot—nay, it *must* not—give them a better standing in the world. If it does, then the world has entered the House of CHRIST, and turned the Divine Master out of doors. So much for our Superiors; as for us,—the rank and file of the Sisterhood—I repeat, as regards the world, we are among those who *serve*, we repudiate all rank, all worldly position; we disclaim anything like adulation; we do not want Mrs. A. or Miss B. to rise to us, and treat us as princesses, far less as saints."

CHAPTER XLI.

A HINT TO A NOVICE.

JUST then one of the younger children made her appearance in tears. She had fallen, she sobbed, out of a swing and exhibited a bad bruise on which Sister Mabel bestowed much sympathy. The little girl was evidently even more frightened than hurt, and the Sister taking her in her lap soothed her with loving speeches, and a great many kisses, till, at length, the almost hysterical crying ceased, and after a while little Clara was willing to be tempted back to play. She put up her face to be kissed before she slid off the Sister's knee, and returned the caress most heartily.

"Lady Honoria will plead you as her example," laughed Mary, as Sister Mabel settled her collar which was a good deal disarranged by these proceedings. "See, she is looking this way, and now she is kissing Susan Sharp."

"She must be a simpleton," replied the Sister, composedly, "if she cannot perceive the difference of our positions. I am as a mother to these little ones, and as such I caress them. How is it possible to bring up children without kissing them? You might as well try to rear a plant without sunshine. The children thoroughly understand this. They know they are to me as my own children; but that these ladies represent the mistresses with whom some day they will take service, and they know that it is a religious duty, and a fulfilment of the law of love, to give honour where honour is due. I am not afraid of the children taking liberties, my difficulty is with the 'old blue ribbons' as they call themselves. But what can one expect from them when one can put no sense into these very irrational ladies? I declare," said Sister Mabel, watching the adieux now taking place between Lady Honoria and the Confraternity girls, "that it would seem as if that good woman, and others like her, made it the object of their lives to undo all our labours."

"Hurrah, she is going," said Mary. "She does not see you, that is lucky. What a bonnet! Depend upon it those Confraternity girls will take mental note of that, and try to copy it. If my lady is their equal why should they not dress like her? Oh, here comes the pony phaeton, and the outriders; and, I declare, there goes Miss Boothby with her. What a blessing! What is Sister Caroline going to do now? She looks this way; she wants to come to you, I know."

Sister Mabel beckoned, and the young novice came with all speed to her side.

"You have forgotten something, Sister Caroline," said her former Superior, very gravely.

"Have I, my Sister?" asked Carrie, looking over her dress to see if anything was wanting to it.

"I think you did not see Miss Mary, you have forgotten your curtsey to her."

Both Mary and Carrie blushed crimson; and the latter who was kneeling by Sister Mabel's side, rose immediately and made her reverence with downcast eyes. Mary saw a lecture was coming and meditated her escape. The next words decided her, and she fled without leave-taking.

"And you forgot to address her properly this morning, it seemed to me that you treated her as your equal."

Sister Caroline looked much distressed. "I did not mean—" she began falteringly.

"But Miss Boothby had turned your head, eh, my child?" said Sister Mabel.

It was wonderful how these few quiet words cleared the cobwebs from Carrie's brain, and she became in a trice the same humble, earnest-minded girl she had been until that day.

Sister Mabel soon gathered the heads of Miss Boothby's discourse, and after demolishing them one by one, cautioned Carrie against that lady, and advised her to report the whole matter to Sister Alice, the mistress of the novices, "and I hope it will be some time before she gives you another holiday," she added smiling. "Do not look so downcast. I am not angry with you. You have been very foolish, that is all, young things often are. But do not fall into this particular folly again, my child. Do not for one moment allow the thought that you are of *more consequence* as 'Sister Caroline,' than as simple 'Carrie Saunders;' or that you are one scrap holier to-day because you wear a grey habit, than you were the day before yesterday when you wore a print frock; or that it is possible for a person to become more spiritual, or a bit better than her neighbours by changing a net cap for a linen one.

"Never for one single instant allow any one to persuade you that your novitiate has conferred holiness upon you. Any more soul-destroying delusion cannot be conceived. It has bound you to a stricter rule, it has pledged you to a higher standard. Therefore, remember, my child; so far from conferring holiness, it deepens and darkens your faults. The higher the flight the greater the fall. And should you ever be professed, this will become truer still. The greatness of our aim should keep us very very humble, and in our

intercourse with those unbound by religious rule, if we compare ourselves with them it should always be to our own disadvantage. They with so many distractions—so many hindrances—so few advantages, doing so much; we with our many privileges, our many helps—our blessed vocation—making so little progress—doing so little!

“And if we perceive faults in them, let us consider whether in some form or other we do not the same ourselves—remembering that a fault in us, is tenfold greater than a fault in them, ‘for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.’

“Indeed we may make Keble’s words specially our own, and say,

‘So like an Angel’s is our bliss,
(Oh, thought to comfort and appal)
It needs must bring, if used amiss,
An Angel’s hopeless fall.”

CHAPTER XLII.

ANOTHER VISITING DAY.

THE Thursday before the first Sunday in October, Sister Mabel sat in her room, writing letters to some of her children now out in the world. She had hoped no interruption would come before they were finished, as she was rather behindhand with them, but presently a gentle knock was heard at the door, and on her saying “Come in,” Lydia appeared with something white in her hands.

The Sister’s first impulse was to say she was busy, and get rid of the intruder as quickly as possible; but there was such a bright flush on the child’s face, such animation in her eyes, such dimpling smiles upon her lips and cheeks, that Sister Mabel changed her mind, and holding out her hand, asked, “What is it, Lydia? something seems to have made you very happy.”

Without answering, the laughing child shook out that which she held in her hands, and holding it up, displayed—a shirt.

“Ah, a shirt!”

Lydia laughed.

“For Mark, I suppose?”

Lydia nodded. Her rapture at present seemed too great for words.

"And who made it? Did you?"

"Sister, it has been my secret. Don't you remember I wouldn't tell you the other evening what I was doing? I said you should know before visiting day. Nobody has known but Sister Ruth, and Sister Rachel, and Rose and some of the girls, only one or two."

Sister Mabel smiled, patted the little girl's cheek, and proceeded to examine the work. "It is very nicely made. Sister Ruth helped you, I suppose, and who washed it?"

"Sister," said the little needlewoman in fresh ecstasies of delight and nestling close to the Sister as she spoke, "I've done it all myself, every morsel. Sister Ruth showed me how to cut out, but I cut this out myself; and I've fixed it myself, and I've put in every stitch; and I made the button holes myself; and then I marked it; see, Sister;" there was 'Mark Staunton' at full length as neatly worked as if by fairy fingers; "and then Sister Rachel showed me how to wash and iron;—don't you remember, Sister, she asked you if I might help do the monitors' aprons?—and I washed it, and starched it, and ironed it all myself; and now it is finished! Don't you think Mark will be pleased?"

That was the summit of her hope—her innocent ambition—"Would not Mark be pleased?"

There was a mist in Sister Mabel's eyes, and something in her throat prevented her immediate reply. She kissed the child's cheeks, and lips, and eyes, before answering, then she said, "I think he will be very much pleased, indeed; and I think it is very nicely done."

Lydia sighed for very happiness. "I wish Sunday was come," she said; and then Sister Mabel remembered that she was on that day to hear of Mark's matrimonial intentions, and wondered whether she would be pleased or not, and hoped that Mark would not be too much engrossed by his own concerns to give due admiration to his little sister's work.

Whilst thinking these things, and stroking the little girl's dark hair, the latter continued, "But, Sister dear, I've such a favour to ask you!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Sister; in the store-room there's some large-sized paper, several sheets, may I have one to fold the shirt in? or Mark will spoil it carrying it home."

"I doubt if one will be quite large enough as you have folded it; if not you may have two."

"Oh, thank you, Sister!" exclaimed Lydia. Then she looked shy, and said, "And Sister—"

"Well."

Lydia's voice became very coaxing, and she almost whispered as she preferred her next request. "In the store-box there's some narrow, very narrow, red ribbon. It was had for tying up our presents last Christmas. May I have a little piece just to tie up my parcel with, to make it look pretty? 'Red ribbons,' you know, Sister."

"A little piece will not do; you may have as much as you want."

"Oh thank you, Sister!" in still greater ecstasy. "And, Sister dear—" this was more coaxing still.

Sister Mabel leant back in her chair and laughed. "Why you unconscionable child! What have you got the face to ask for now?"

"Sister, do you remember the lavender we gathered in the summer? It is all lying in one of the linen closets, may I ask Sister Ruth for one little piece, just one tiny piece, to put with the shirt to make it smell sweet?"

"You may tell Sister Ruth that I have given you leave to have as much as you like."

Lydia almost shouted with delight.

After she had left the room the Sister sat for some moments lost in thought, and forgetful of her letters.

"What a treasure of unselfish love there is in that little heart!" said she to herself. "Pray God it may never be chilled or blighted," and Mr. Neville's words returned to her recollection, "Your little Lydia is an embryo saint."

Sunday arrived in due course; and it is to be feared that Lydia's thoughts wandered a good deal during the morning service. She looked eagerly for Mark as she left the chapel. The men-patients, from St. Barnabas' and St. Luke's, with whom he sat, always quitted the chapel before the rest of the congregation; but Mark generally contrived to linger sufficiently long at the door to catch a glimpse of his little sister. Lydia almost counted, now, on this Sunday peep, but to-day she saw no signs of him; and it was with a slight feeling of disappointment that she turned into the orphanage; a feeling soon, however, swallowed up in the eager expectation of the afternoon. Her parcel neatly folded, and tied with its red ribbons, she laid, for safety, on the Sister's rostrum; but there, to her great surprise, Sister Mabel found it still, when she returned to the schoolroom, after a rather lengthy absence, just before the bell began to ring for evensong.

There lay the parcel, and beside it stood Lydia drowned in tears.

"Why, what has happened?" asked the Sister with concern.

"He has not been, oh, Sister, he has not been," sobbed the dis-

appointed child, "it's the first visiting day he has ever missed ; but, oh, Mark has not come."

Sister Mabel thought of Emma and felt rather indignant. "Tiresome man !" was her inward reflection, "he never can have stopped chattering with that girl all this time !"

After evensong she contrived to waylay Davis, and asked tidings of the missing Mark.

"We've seen nothing of him, ma'am," was Davis's reply ; "and there's that silly chit, Emma, going on about it as if there weren't a thousand reasons why he should be away."

"He might have stayed away any other Sunday ; but to-day being visiting day it is unfortunate. It is the first visiting day he has missed coming to see his sister," said Sister Mabel in some vexation, for she felt sorry for Lydia's disappointment.

"The more reason she should take it quietly," replied Davis. Emma's lamentations had rather rumbled her, so she had no sympathies just now to bestow anywhere.

"I wonder what can have become of him?" mused Sister Mabel aloud.

"Bless you, Sister ! a hundred things might keep him. His master's house might take fire, or a neighbour fall ill, or a horse fall into a pit, or that old body that does for him might be took bad, and Mark Staunton isn't the man to leave any one as wanted his help."

"No, indeed," replied the Sister, and she followed Lydia to suggest all these probabilities to her for her consolation. But though Lydia dried her eyes, she could not but think it very provoking if houses had been burnt, or people fallen ill, or horses tumbled into pits, on that particular Sunday of all Sundays in the year ; "And oh, Sister," sighed she, "think what a weary time it will be to wait till the first Sunday in November !"

"Your patience shall not be tried so long as that," replied Sister Mabel smiling. "If Mark has been unavoidably prevented from coming to see you to-day, I will get a special order from the Mother for you to see him next Sunday."

On this the tears dried up, and Lydia's smiles broke forth once more. She thanked the Sister heartily, and, at her suggestion, gave her precious parcel into Sister Ruth's charge to be taken care of in the linen closet.

"After all, Sister dear," said she, coming back skipping and dancing when she had seen it thus safely disposed of, "I have still my pleasure to look forward to, instead of it all being over by this time."

Davis was not so successful in restoring sunshine to Emma's

face. The more she lectured, the more Emma pouted, and steered as near a quarrel with Mrs. Davis as she could, without arriving at an actual collision. She thought she had abundant cause for pouting. In consequence of Mark's extreme desire to tell his little sister of his engagement himself, Emma had to keep her betrothal a secret, and had done so patiently for a whole month. But she was so happy in her projected marriage, and so proud of Mark, that she longed to let all her little world know of her good fortune. She hated secrets, she said, and now how did she know how much longer she would be required to keep this! Moreover, being a very affectionate girl, she was really anxious for the day when she might take the little orphaned sister to her heart. So she thought herself very ill used, and would not be talked into equanimity.

Monday found Lydia as cheerful as ever; the honour and glory of a special visiting order was to be hers next Sunday. Sister Mabel had promised to ask for it.

The Sister was called out of the schoolroom that afternoon just after the children had begun work.

"I will not forget you, Lydia," she said, smiling, as she encountered the little girl's eager look, and Lydia's fingers went more nimbly than ever over her work.

An hour or more passed, but Sister Mabel did not return; when just as Sister Louise was beginning to wonder whether she would do so at all before working time was over, the portress from the mother house tapped at the door to request that Lydia Lee might be allowed to go with her to the Mother's room.

The little girl's eyes sparkled, and her heart beat high with pleasure. She was to go and receive the order, no doubt. As she trotted by the side of the portress, her lightheartedness would have overflowed in chatter had that functionary showed the slightest disposition for conversation. But never a word she spoke, and Lydia thought her so awful and stern that she kept her lips fast closed till she came to the Mother's door. There, to her surprise, the portress stopped her just as she was about to knock, and stooping down kissed her twice with a quiet fervour that amazed the little girl, saying in a low earnest voice, "God bless you, my child, my dear child, and have you ever in His holy keeping." Then she stalked away without another word.

Lydia watched her stiff figure till it was out of sight. "How very kind she is!" thought she, "I wish she didn't look so cross."

Her timid knock received an instant response, and in another moment she stood blushing and smiling before the Mother Superior.

"Come here, my child," said the Mother, holding out her hand;

and drawing her close to her, she passed her arm round her and pressed her to her side. Sister Mabel was standing by the fireplace, with her back to the door, apparently occupied in picking to pieces a Michaelmas daisy she had taken from a flower-glass on the mantelpiece. She did not move, or look up as Lydia entered.

"Sister Mabel tells me you have had a great disappointment," said the Superior gravely.

"Yes, Mother," replied the little girl, raising her laughing eyes to the Superior's face. She found there no answering smile, however, but a grave searching look which daunted her, she knew not why, and her eyes drooped shyly again.

"Your brother would not have disappointed you if he could have helped it," was the Superior's next, and apparently unnecessary, observation.

"No, Mother," replied Lydia heartily; and again a smile dimpled her cheek.

"He was prevented coming,—his master sent over to-day to tell us the reason why,—he had an accident on Saturday, and so he could not come."

The Superior's voice, always low and musical, was softer and gentler than ever, as she spoke these few sentences very slowly, almost hesitatingly.

The smile died off Lydia's face. "Is he much hurt, Mother?" she asked, her anxiety overcoming her shyness. She glanced as she spoke towards Sister Mabel, who had thrown away the daisy, and was now leaning her head on her hand. Lydia could not see her face, but a vague feeling came over her that something dreadful had happened, and that the Sister was weeping. She turned her startled gaze to the Superior's face; the look that met her there was one of tenderest pity, and the arm that encircled her drew her closer still.

"I will tell you how it happened," said the Mother, still speaking very slowly; "On Saturday a gentleman brought a horse to the forge to be shod, and Mark was to shoe it. Just as he was stooping down, the horse lashed out suddenly, and struck Mark upon the temple. Mark fell—they ran to pick him up—he was carried into the house—the doctor was sent for, and everything that could be done was done, my child, but it was all of no use; he never spoke, or moved, or looked up again."

There was a moment of deep silence. That Sister Mabel was weeping now was beyond a doubt, and the Superior's eyes overflowed with tears. Lydia looked from one to the other,—a feeling of horror seized her,—but still she did not realise the Mother's words.

"Will he be ill long?" she whispered under her breath.

"My darling, you have not understood me," said the Superior, much distressed; "a blow on the temple is fatal—people cannot recover from it. My poor child, my dear child, my poor little one, your dear brother is—dead."

There was no mistaking that word. Like a lightning flash the sense of her utter bereavement broke upon the orphan girl, scathing her very soul. At her scream of agony Sister Mabel turned hastily to take her in her arms, but the Superior had already clasped the stricken child to her breast.

"Leave her to me, my dear," she said, as the orphanage Sister would have taken her from her, "leave her to me; she will be best here. I shall keep her with me for the rest of the day. Come and fetch her away at bedtime, leave her now."

Sister Mabel left the room to pray for her child if she might not comfort her. But who could comfort Lydia then? The Superior did not attempt it. She made no effort to check the child's agony of weeping, her passionate cries for her brother, her reiterated entreaty, "Oh, take me to him, let me go, oh, let me go to him;" or, as the exhaustion of grief came gradually upon her—her despairing moan—"What shall I do? what shall I do?" The Mother uttered no commonplaces about resignation—submission—and the like. She met the storm of grief only with gentle words of sympathy and love; and when the suffering child ceased weeping at last from very weariness, and her convulsive sobs changed to long shuddering sighs, she rocked her on her lap, and hushed and soothed her with kisses and endearments, as she would have hushed to sleep a wailing babe.

Then she began to attend to her little physical comforts. She bathed her fevered hands and face, gave her a cup of tea, brought by the sympathising portress, which Lydia drank eagerly, though she turned from food, and, finally, when the little girl seemed revived and calmed, found her some little employments in her room, just sufficient to give the aching heart a rest from thought.

Towards evening Lydia seemed more her former self. She had dusted the Mother's bookshelves, and arranged some drawers in her writing-table. In doing this she had come upon a number of pretty little allegorical pictures, and the Mother had paused in her own work to explain some of these to the child, and had then given her her choice of any one of them. The stillness, the Mother's kindness, and the novelty of her employment, all acted as a charm on the little girl. Young hearts soon weary of sorrow. A longing to be once more happy sprang up in Lydia's breast. That horrible *news* seemed already a far-off dream, and she experienced that

craving we must all more or less have felt after some crushing sorrow that threatened to blight all after-life, to wake and find it was but that—a dream, and nothing more.

Seeing her so tranquil the Mother sat down to finish some letters she had laid aside for Lydia's sake. Occasionally she glanced at the little girl, and saw her now and then apparently lost in thought as she sat on the floor by the drawer she was arranging; now and then dreamily turning over the packet of little pictures. At length, becoming engrossed in what she was herself about, the Mother forgot for awhile her little charge. She was presently roused by a gentle touch on her arm. Lydia stood by her, pale and wearied with the effects of her long weeping, but with a bright expectant look in her eyes.

"Mother," she said pleadingly, "don't you think it might be a mistake? May somebody go to Lowton and find out? May I, Mother? I know my way. It can't be true. It isn't possible, is it, Mother? It isn't possible that Mark can be"—she hesitated and her lip quivered—"dead."

It did seem impossible indeed! And when the Mother in consternation at the little mourner's incredulity threw aside her pen and took her once more on her lap, it seemed heartbreaking work to have to extinguish the ray of hope that had begun to dawn in the young heart so strangely stricken.

She was obliged to explain, however, that it was true. And Lydia had to school herself to face the dread reality. Gradually it assumed a fixed and definite form. Mark was dead. She would never more see his cheery face, or hear his kindly voice. She had seen him for the last time. Oh, sad, sad thought. Never to sit on his knee again, or be clasped in his arms again. Never more, never more. Sitting on the Superior's lap, with her head on her shoulder, Lydia recalled that last visiting day. She remembered how she watched him from the door; how he had stopped at the porch on his way to chapel, and looking back to her, had shouted "good-bye." And that was his last farewell, and she had never known it! As this thought struck her, it wrung her heart with anguish. "If I had only known, oh, if I had only known!" she cried aloud. And then the passion of grief burst forth once more.

Sister Mabel did not come to fetch her till the children were in bed. She had informed them of the dreadful blow that had fallen on their little companion; and there was not a girl among them that had not wept with heartfelt sympathy; but Sister Mabel thought it best that they should have no speech with Lydia that first sad night.

She took the little girl with her to the oratory, and knelt with

her in prayer. She herself prepared her for rest, and did not leave her till the weary eyes were closed in slumber.

In the night, however, she was roused by a tapping at her door, and on opening it, found Rose crying and shivering outside.

"Oh, Sister," she sobbed, in answer to the question as to what she did there, "Lydia has woken up, and is crying so; may I speak to her, and comfort her?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And may I take her into my bed? she is so desolate!"

The Sister stroked her head. "You may comfort her in any way your love suggests, my dear. I only hope your efforts may be successful."

Rose curtsied her thanks; but still she cried, and still she lingered by the Sister's door.

"Do you want anything else, my love?"

"Yes, Sister;" she crept to her Superior's side, and nestled her face in her bosom. "Sister, I never felt before how wicked I am. Now Sanna is so ill, and Lydia is so unhappy, I don't feel fit to be with them; I feel as if I oughtn't to dare to pray for them, and yet I want to do so; I don't feel as if it is possible that I could be of any comfort to them, or as if God would hear my prayers."

"Ah, my child," replied the Sister, "you are learning now the lesson that if we would be of real service to those whom the Hand of God has touched, we must be of the number of those who have been accustomed to live as in His presence. Then we shall feel no terror, no confusion, in the day of His coming: when He comes, that is, to visit a soul by sickness, or bereavement, or by death."

She led the young girl into her cell, and kneeling down with her, offered a simple, fervent prayer on her behalf, that the grace of the LORD might be shed abroad in her heart, and that she might be enabled to be a comfort to her little companions. Also for them—that the greater became Sanna's bodily weakness, the stronger might grow her spiritual life; and that into the stricken heart of little Lydia might be poured that heavenly comfort, that healing surpassing Peace, which transcends all human understanding.

About an hour afterwards Sister Mabel walked through the dormitory to see if all was still, and found Rose and Lydia clasped in each other's arms, both wrapped in peaceful sleep.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ONCE MORE AT LOWTON.

THERE was bitter mourning also in the Chaplain's house. Poor Emma's cup of joy had been dashed from her lips just as she had begun to taste it. And with her grief was mingled a feeling of something like remorse. She had been angry with Mark the day before, and at the very moment that she was chafing at what she believed his neglect, he was lying stiff and cold, cut off in the very morning of his life.

If Davis had ever appeared unsympathising before, no one could accuse her of being so now. Had Emma been her own child she could scarcely have soothed her more lovingly; and Mrs. Neville's wise tenderness afforded much help and comfort to the poor girl.

As to Mary, her heart overflowed with sympathy towards both Emma and Lydia; she cried heartily when she first heard the startling tidings; and she it was who first suggested the idea that Lydia should come for a few days to their house.

"It will take her away from the bustle and merriment of the orphanage, which must jar upon her so just now; don't you think so, mother? and she and Emma will comfort one another."

Mrs. Neville heartily assented, and both the Superior and Sister Mabel greatly applauded the scheme. So Lydia was taken to the Chaplain's house, and then, for the first time, she knew that Mark had intended Emma to be her sister.

Even in the midst of her deep grief a little spasm of jealousy seized her, and a feeling of being rather aggrieved at not having known this sooner. But all this passed as a morning mist when she knew how her brother had counted upon telling her the news himself, and her heart smote her for having for one second felt grudgingly towards any one whom Mark loved.

"The funeral is to be on Thursday," said the Superior to Sister Mabel. "This man Burt, Mark's master, wants to know if Lydia is to attend. I should like her to do so. It is to be at noon; that being the men's dinner hour, Burt has arranged that his 'mates,' as he calls them, shall be able to attend as bearers without its interfering much with their work. He says if Lydia can walk to Lowton he will undertake to send her back in his cart. The question is, who is to take her there?"

"Cannot I, my Mother? or Sister Rachel? Sister Ruth is not strong enough to walk so far."

But neither the Superior nor Mr. Neville wished any of the Sisters to go. There were reasons, they considered, which rendered it very undesirable for any of them to be seen at Lowton. So the question remained undecided till Mrs. Davis came to the rescue, declaring that she would be Lydia's companion. She had black things, she said, so mourning would be no difficulty.

"But how about Lydia's mourning?" asked Sister Mabel, "we have only a day and a half to prepare it in, what shall we do?"

"Mrs. Neville has undertaken it, my dear," said the Superior.

"And it's half finished already," added Davis, smiling gravely at Sister Mabel's satisfaction and surprise. "Miss Mary, and Emma, and I are working at it; and we have put the child to help with the light housework, and to wait on the mistress; the more she and Emma have to occupy them the better it is for both."

Sister Mabel thought so too, and inquired after Emma.

"She bears it as well as one could expect," said her kind-hearted fellow-servant; "and it's a good thing for her having the child's mourning to see to; it keeps her thoughts off herself. But the greatest miss will be by-and-by."

"How do you mean?" said the Sister.

"Why, both she and the child now are in a sort of excitement, and every one pities them, and makes much of them. But they'll feel their loss most when everything goes on just as before, and people have forgotten their trouble, and have left off pitying them. That's the worst time, Sister; that's when we most miss those we've lost. The world wags on just the same, and yet we are all alone." The tears rolled down the good woman's face as she spoke. "I declare to you, Sister," she continued, "that even I can hardly bear to think that I shall never see that fine young fellow again; and the master, he feels it too, I can tell you. But when Emma was taking on about it being so sudden, the master he said in his kind, quiet way, 'My good girl,' said he, 'it wasn't sudden for Mark, he was as ready as any man can be who doesn't know when his hour will come.' And then he told her how Mark had meant to have come over early that very Sunday morning to make his Communion, and how he had made the whole of last week his preparation week, little thinking, poor dear fellow, that he was getting ready to meet the LORD, not in the Blessed Sacrament, but actually face to face. Lydia she was by when master was talking to Emma, and you should have seen how the child listened. Her soul seemed in her eyes. But there, I must go back to my work if her frock is to be finished in time."

Emma had pleaded to go to the funeral also. But Mrs. Neville persuaded her to stay at home with her. Mark's engagement was

not generally known, and she thought it better that Lydia and Mrs. Davis should be the only mourners. Emma yielded the more readily that when the funeral day at length arrived she felt completely unnerved, and was only too glad to take her work and sit quietly by her sympathising mistress, who had known so much trouble and bereavement herself, that she was well able to throw herself into the sorrows of others, and out of the abundance of her own experience to comfort and counsel those who were, as yet, unused to grief.

On Thursday morning Davis, coming to see if Lydia was ready, found her putting on her medal and red ribbon over her black frock.

"Don't you think you had better leave that behind, my dear?" said she, "it looks so gay like on the black."

Lydia looked down. She was evidently afraid to withstand any of Mrs. Davis's suggestions, but had no mind to take off the badge.

"I do believe she wants to show it off to her old cronies at Lowton," thought Davis; "dear me, how vain children are! You'd much better not wear it to-day," she added aloud.

Lydia placed her hand on it as if about to take it off, but looked up at Davis with pleading, tearful eyes.

"Come, come," said the good woman rather impatiently, for time was getting on, and they had a long walk before them. "Take it off, there's a good girl; bless the child! nobody at Lowton will know it's a good-conduct badge, they'll think you've put it on for finery."

"Oh, it isn't that, ma'am," said Lydia, struggling with her tears, "I don't want any one to know it's for good conduct, only Mark—he wanted me so to have it, and I counted so on showing it him last visiting day, he would have been so pleased; and now he's never seen it. And I would like to wear it so, if you don't mind, ma'am, this last time that I shall ever see him."

Davis was instantly mollified; Lydia retained her ribbon, and the two set off hand in hand for Lowton, Davis carrying a small parcel under her shawl.

As they were passing the orphanage gate Sister Ruth ran out with something in her hand, and called Davis back. Bidding Lydia go on, she turned to see what the Sister wanted; when she rejoined the little girl, she held two parcels instead of one under her shawl, and a bunch of flowers in her hand, but Lydia's thoughts were too engrossed to notice it.

The walk to Lowton was, for the most part, down hill, nevertheless, Mrs. Davis found it sufficiently fatiguing; and when about half-way there, happening to spy a very commodious-looking stile, she declared she must sit down and rest, or she would soon have no breath left in her body. In her endeavours to establish herself

comfortably upon this extempore seat, the shawl flew open, and Lydia's eyes rested on the parcel she had herself prepared with such care that very day week—her shirt wrapped up with lavender, and tied with red ribbons.

What could Davis be going to do with it! She looked up in her face in utter astonishment, but did not speak. As soon as Mrs. Davis had settled herself to her satisfaction, she noticed the child's look of startled inquiry.

"Ah, my dear," said she very gently, "Sister Mabel thought you'd like your dear brother to lie down for his last sleep in the shirt you'd made for him yourself. Mr. Burt gave the Mother his word that the coffin shouldn't be closed till you'd had your last look; and Mark shall have your shirt, or my name's not Jane Davis."

Lydia sat down on the grass at the foot of the stile, (Mrs. Davis giving various directions as to how she should do this without spoiling her frock) and cried quietly; but there was some joy mingled with her tears. Here was still something to be done through her for her brother, and all her loving labour hadn't been quite in vain. She dwelt with pleasure on the thought that Mark would still wear the shirt, and in her heart of hearts she thanked and blessed Sister Mabel for her thoughtful and loving remembrance. When they rose to pursue their journey she smiled through her tears as she asked if she might carry it; and Davis's kind heart was greatly relieved to find that what she had feared might agitate, had really comforted the little girl.

How strange to Lydia seemed that return to Lowton, what recollections thronged upon her as she passed each familiar object. At length they stood before the door of the house where Mark had lodged. Fortunately no one was there but Mrs. Goodwin, who received Lydia with much kindness, and Mrs. Davis with great respect.

She begged them to sit down, and then began a long rambling account of the fatal accident. Davis fidgeted; she was longing to visit the chamber of death before any strangers came to the house, and her eyes wandered frequently to the clock as poor Mrs. Goodwin went maundering on; detailing with the most provoking accuracy what each neighbour had said when he or she heard it, what every one did, and what she, Mrs. Goodwin, thought; and dwelling on every one of the funeral preparations, and expenses, till Davis was in absolute despair.

At last Mrs. Goodwin came to a part of her narrative that arrested her attention, and made Lydia's tears flow fast again. After describing the coffin, and relating who made it, and what it cost,

and how much better it was than somebody else's coffin who had been buried a short time before; and relating all that she had done in reference to the last sad rites, Mrs. Goodwin concluded, "And there's not a wish of his, ma'am, I'm sure, as I haven't attended to, even to putting them stockings on his blessed feet."

"What stockings?" asked Davis.

"Them, ma'am, as Liddy mended for him; the very first as she tried her hand on for him. They was but rags, but la! she made 'em quite tidy, and the store Mark set by them stockings was wholly surprising, ma'am, I do assure you. 'Mrs. Goodwin,' says he to me, leastways he said, 'mother Goodwin;' that was his pleasant way, you see, ma'am, not as meaning no disrespect to me, for Mark wasn't one of them young men," &c., &c. Here Mrs. Goodwin became discursive and indulged in a long panegyric on Mark at the expense of the young men of his generation, then she forgot about the stockings, and was going off to something else, but Davis, anxious to hear the end of the story brought her back to her subject, and finally learnt the whole tale of Mark's desire to be buried in these stockings, and gathered that Mrs. Goodwin had faithfully complied with his request.

"I put them on myself with these here very hands; I did indeed, I do assure you, ma'am," concluded the old woman, with an earnestness that seemed to imply that she feared Mrs. Davis might suppose she had another pair of hands by her, inferior to those she generally used.

Davis saw here a great opportunity. She had her own views as to the disposal of those we love for their long sleep. She doubted not that Mrs. Goodwin had hers also, and that their views would not, in all probability, coincide. Her one desire was to obtain free access to that darkened room above, and see that all was so arranged that the young sister might feel no shock in looking for the last time on the brother so tenderly loved. But she felt she must be very careful not to give offence, or seem to slight the old woman's services.

Taking the parcel from Lydia, she asked Mrs. Goodwin to do her the favour to let her speak to her alone; and when she had the old woman all to herself she showed her the shirt—moved her to tears by her account of Lydia's labour of love, and thus easily obtained permission to do anything she pleased.

Meantime Lydia sat by Mrs. Goodwin's fire watching the bubbling of a little pot that hung over it; her thoughts wandering backwards and forwards with a dreamy restlessness which changed to a sort of shrinking, sickening dread, when Davis at length returned to her, saying caressingly, "Now, my pet, would you like to come with me?"

Lydia rose, and clinging to the kind hand held out to her crept up the narrow stairs.

She need not have been so afraid to look, there was nothing terrible there. Davis had drawn aside the curtains, and the little whitewashed room seemed full of sunlight; through the window she had opened came the pleasant air of an early autumn day; on the bare bedstead stood the coffin and in it lay the sleeper. Though partly covered with a light white wrapper, (which Lydia recognised as one on which she had seen Mrs. Neville busily engaged) it was evident to her at a glance that he wore her shirt, and the stockings which had been her first little offering of love. The flowers which Sister Ruth had given Davis with the parcel when she called her back, were tied in little bunches with the very red ribbon Lydia had begged to make her gift look pretty; and were disposed so as to ornament the wrapper. Even the lavender had not been forgotten, it lay tied with red ribbon, on the dead man's breast. His face was very calm; there was an expression on his lips almost as if he smiled, and as Lydia gazed on him, he looked so like himself she could not help fancying that in another moment he would open his eyes and speak to her.

The loquacious Mrs. Goodwin had withdrawn, and Davis did not disturb by any word or movement her long lingering gaze. At first she stood clinging to the hand she held, hushed with awe; but as she became more used to the scene before her Lydia was better able to realise that this was her last look at the brother who had been the load-star, the object of her life. Her grief broke forth with renewed intensity, but her weeping was not loud. Her exclamations from time to time, "Oh Mark, Mark, oh do come back. Oh, Mark, what shall I do!" were almost whispered; it was as if she feared to disturb that deep repose, to ruffle the unclouded countenance of the sleeper.

Davis sat down by the bedside, and took her on her lap. In her quiet homely way she tried to speak words of comfort and cheer; but perhaps the tears she was now herself shedding abundantly were the best balm for Lydia's wounded heart. They are the best comforters who "weep with those that weep."

"He will not speak, he will not look at me," moaned the little girl. "Mark, dear Mark." She stooped forward and kissed the pale cold brow. The shock of the death chill made her start back, and hide her face shudderingly on Davis' neck. But she ceased crying. An undefined feeling stole over her that this was not Mark. Her Mark was gone,—he was not here—this was but his semblance. When had she ever before shrunk from him as she did now? why *shrink* if this were really he, the brother so fondly loved?

Who has not felt this standing by the dead ?

A vague bewilderment seemed to creep over her ; and she sat quietly now on Davis' lap trying to put her thoughts and feelings into shape.

So they two watched by the dead man's side, till Davis' quick ear caught the sound of voices, and footsteps approaching the house. She knew full well what this implied, and rising drew a pair of scissors from her pocket, cut off a lock of Mark's brown hair, and as she wrapped it up and put it in her pocket, said, " We must be thinking of going now, my pet ; you don't mind going down by yourself, do you, my dear ? for I would like to stay here till everything's done that's necessary."

The voices were now distinctly heard below, and Mrs. Goodwin hobbling up stairs.

" May the lads come up to screw down the coffin ?" said she.

" In one moment, Mrs. Goodwin," replied Davis, " just wait till Liddy comes down."

Mrs. Goodwin hobbled back again. Lydia threw her arms round Davis and sobbed convulsively. " Mrs. Davis, dear Mrs. Davis, will you do one thing more ? My medal, he wanted me so to have it, and now he'll never know, and I don't care for it now ; I only wanted it to please him : oh, will you put it in the coffin with him ? I don't want it now."

It was her last offering of pure unselfish love. Not for one moment did it occur to her that she had no power to dispose of her badge ; and though Davis knew it of course, she never stopped to think about that now. Taking it from the weeping child she passed the ribbon round the dead man's neck, and laid the medal on that heart which had once been so full of love, so faithful and so true.

The room was full of sunshine, and without, nature, still wearing her summer garb, only with richer, fuller tints, seemed to rejoice beneath a sky of cloudless blue ; the air was full of pleasant sounds, the soft west wind of fragrance, everything seemed to speak of peace, and hope, and love.

Lydia perceived this as she glanced through the open window ; then she turned her last last look on that dear brother's face. There also was hope, and love, and peace, deep peace.

There he slumbered wrapped in the garments that told of Christian sympathy, and a little sister's love ; bright blossoms lay above him, and on his breast the sparkling medal, on which the sunshine played, making distinctly visible the legend which it bore, " Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A DILEMMA.

A SHORT time before Mark's funeral cortège started for church, two sportsmen sauntered out of Lowton Rectory. They were both in shooting costume, and their whole turn-out bore evidence of being the handiwork of a first-rate West End tailor. One was short and dark, and wore a brown suit and a green necktie; the other was a tall aristocratic looking man, in a grey suit and blue necktie; about their heels swarmed several terriers, bulls, skyes, &c.; and both men were smoking. They lounged into the stable yard, where a groom was preparing a dogcart of the most approved build; in the stable were two splendid bays ready harnessed for a tandem.

"Cordy," said the tallest of the two sportsmen, "you needn't put the bays to yet, this confounded funeral isn't till half-past twelve."

"Very good, sir," replied the groom touching his hat.

"And Cordy, bring the tandem round to the churchyard gate, at twenty-three minutes to one, not a minute later."

"Very good, sir," repeated the groom.

"Haw, haw!" laughed the short man in brown, "do you expect to bury a dead blacksmith in seven minutes, Gerry?"

"Twenty blacksmiths, Jack, if need be," replied the other. "But what," he groaned, "could have possessed the fool to get knocked on the head, and then to be buried on such a splendid morning, with ten miles to drive to the Babbage preserves!"

"'Tis hard lines, sartinly, sir," observed the sympathetic groom, "and he only a labrer, and the funeral not much better than a pauper's. It's downright degradation!"

The gentlemen laughed, went into the stable, examined the horses, patted the bays, and then lounged back again.

"I say, Cordy," observed a fellow groom, but newly joined to the establishment, "if our guv'nor's such a swell, what's he do in his parish at home? Don't he bury no folk, nor christen 'em, nor such like?"

Cordy snorted with disdain. "I should just think we didn't," said he. "The quality they's different, may be we'd bury or christen them,—if they was county families, that is," he added, correcting himself; "but the guv'nor he's a gentleman, he is, one of your tip-toppers; he just preaches, and reads the Communion; but we

keeps a Curate as does the prayers, and all the other dirty work."

Meantime the gentleman in grey, and his friend, whom he called "Jack," with their hands in their pockets, their cigars in their mouths, and their dogs at their heels, were slowly making their way to the church.

It was a hard case, certainly. They were engaged that morning for a day's shooting on the celebrated Babbage preserves, and here were all their plans disconcerted because a journeyman blacksmith had got knocked on the head, and his mates chose to bury him on that particular Thursday morning.

But where were the Rector and Curate of Lowton, that they were not at hand to inter their own parishioner?

Mr. and Mrs. Dean were making a continental tour, and during their absence their friend the Hon. and Rev. Geraldyn Osman Borne had migrated from his own living, Babbleton-cum-Slop, where game was scarce, to the commodious Rectory of Lowton, he having hired some shooting in the neighbourhood.

In return for the accommodation of the Rectory House, he had undertaken to keep up the dignity of the living by dining out, and giving dinners, scientific lectures in the schoolroom, and an occasional sermon in the church. Certainly he never contemplated such drudgery as having to read the funeral service over any one, unless indeed it had happened to be Lord Babbage—but then he was an earl.

How came it then that he was exposed to such an indignity?

The afternoon before, Mrs. Crawley, the Curate's wife, came down to the rectory in great distress, and mental prostration, to announce that her husband had caught a dreadful cold, and that morning had been commanded by the medical man to keep his bed, as the attack had turned to inflammation. The poor lady whined out her tale in deepest humility, as if she were confessing some grievous crime of which her husband had been guilty.

The Lady Adeliza Borne, to whom she related it, was politely sorry, and offered to send a pot of black currant jelly. Mrs. Crawley was deeply grateful, but would not trouble her ladyship. She had "no doubt Mr. Crawley would be able to take the service on Sunday aided by one of Mr. Borne's eloquent and surpassing sermons," the Lady Adeliza bowed, "but it was the funeral the next day which troubled him; he, Mr. Crawley, could not think whom he should get to take that." Here Mrs. Crawley glanced meekly and imploringly at Lady Adeliza.

"Oh, a funeral is there?" said her ladyship. "Ah, standing out in the damp grass without his hat will not improve Mr. Crawley's cold."

"It is out of the question," exclaimed the horrified Mrs. Crawley, "dear Lady Adeliza, Mr. Crawley is actually in his bed, and has a blister on his chest."

Lady Adeliza was very sorry to hear it.

"The time is so short, or he might, perhaps, have got help from one of the neighbouring parishes, but he don't know whom to send to," sighed Mrs. Crawley; and, again, she looked imploringly at Lady Adeliza.

"Well, the funeral must be put off," said that lady decidedly. "You had better send round to the people whoever they are, and say that the funeral must be put off till Mr. Crawley is about again."

"Oh, we daren't do that," said Mrs. Crawley in dismay: "for it is the funeral of young Staunton who worked for Burt, and who was killed last Saturday by a kick from a horse (I dare say your ladyship heard of the melancholy accident;) and Burt is churchwarden, and we should not dare to offend him: oh, no, that would never do."

"Then really I can make no more suggestions," said Lady Adeliza rising.

"We had hoped—we had thought," faltered Mrs. Crawley, now driven to the point, "that, perhaps, Mr. Borne would be so very kind, just this once."

"As to do what?" asked Lady Adeliza sternly.

"As to read the funeral service," gasped Mrs. Crawley in terror.

"Never!" exclaimed the noble wife, burning with indignation at the base suggestion, "what! Mr. Borne stand out in that damp long grass, and without his hat, and do curate's work! Really, Mrs. Crawley, I am surprised at your want of proper feeling and consideration."

Mrs. Crawley was surprised at herself, for, in spite of her fears of the Lady Adeliza, she actually found herself arguing that some one must read the service, and whom could they apply to if not to Mr. Borne?

What reply Lady Adeliza might have returned we know not, for at that instant entered the Honourable and Reverend Geraldyn Osman Borne, accompanied by his friend the Honourable Jack Delarode, and to them the Lady Adeliza, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, related the audacious Mrs. Crawley's proposition.

Mr. Borne's countenance lengthened with dismay, and he at first declared it totally out of the question that he could assist Mr. Crawley in the present emergency, seeing that he and the Honourable Mr. Delarode were to be at Babbage Castle the next morning by

ten, and should not return till late at night, as they were to dine with the noble owner.

"Then," said Mrs. Crawley, apparently addressing herself to a flower-vase in the centre of the drawing-room table, "who in the world is to bury young Staunton?"

The Honourable Mr. Delarode suggested that "the funeral service was after all mere 'bosh;' if a fellah was dead—why he was dead—and what good could the service do him?"

The whole party sighed an assent; and Lady Adeliza was eloquent on the insolence of these people presuming to fix a day for themselves, and again suggested the postponement of the funeral. But Mr. Borne perceived the inexpediency of this proposal, adding that Friday would be quite as inconvenient to him as Thursday, for he and 'Jack' were going to shoot over Winkleton Manor on Friday, and Poppington on Saturday. In short, that every day for the next three weeks had its fixed engagements which could not be disturbed. As to the service—well, it was after all, as Jack suggested, mere sentiment, but then these country people had such prejudices it would not do to offend them, and Burt was churchwarden, he must not be offended either, especially in the rector's absence. So the matter was finally settled by Mr. Borne promising to read the service on the morrow, as if he were conferring an immense obligation on the parish in general in thus deferring to their 'prejudices;' and on Mr. and Mrs. Crawley in particular, by thus relieving their anxieties.

Mrs. Crawley was unbounded in her thanks; and Mr. Osman Borne gratified to find she was properly conscious of the greatness of his sacrifice, condescended to ask some particulars concerning Mark's accident.

"Staunton, Staunton, surely I have heard that name," he said, at the conclusion of Mrs. Crawley's voluble account of the catastrophe. "I seem to have heard Dean speaking of him on some occasion, what could it have been?"

"Was he not the young man whose sister was spirited away by those horrible Sisters at Kirkminster?" said Lady Adeliza.

"Your ladyship is quite right, he was," replied Mrs. Crawley eagerly. "It was a very sad case. The girl kept house for her brother, and they were very happy; the mother was dead, so the girl was a good deal alone, and somehow or other she got into communication with these dreadful people. I believe one of the Sisters used to come over here disguised as a hawker, and that Mr. Neville was seen about the place in a carter's frock; and the end of it was that they obtained such an influence over the poor thing that she left her brother's house secretly one night, a

walked every step of the way to Kirkminster in a thunderstorm, and they took her in, and though her brother tried every means in his power to get her out, he was never able to succeed; and there she is still, poor thing, if she isn't dead, and, indeed, the grief of losing his sister is thought by many persons to have hastened young Staunton's death."

"How awful!" said the Lady Adeliza.

"Do you hear that, Jack?" asked the Honourable Mr. Borne.

Jack said he did.

"That would make a good leader, eh, Jack?" said Mr. Borne.

"If the story were first sent in as a letter, a very good article might be made of it," replied Jack.

"I do hope, Mr. Delarode, you will take it up," said Lady Adeliza.

"Geraldyn could write the letter, and you could work it up into a first-rate leader;" by which it would appear that Mr. Delarode was connected with the public press.

The pleasure afforded by this nice little literary scheme almost compensated for the annoyance occasioned by Mark's funeral; and that very evening the Honourable and Reverend Geraldyn Osman Borne, assisted by the Lady Adeliza and the Honourable Mr. Delarode, took down the heads, and drew up a rough sketch of this interesting narrative which was to appear as speedily as possible in "The World," the newspaper with which the Honourable Mr. Delarode was connected, under the heading, "Popish Proceedings in the English Church."

CHAPTER XLV.

A WAGER.

HAVING thus explained the circumstances which had placed the Honourable and Reverend Geraldyn Osman Borne in such "a fix," as he himself described it in tones of touching resignation, let us follow him and his friend in their disconsolate walk to church, escorted as they were by all the terriers—black and tan—bulls and skyes, and two handsome pugs belonging to the Lady Adeliza.

Exteriorly Lowton Church was a handsome Norman structure, if we except a square red-brick excrescence on one side of it, which was called the vestry, and the sash windows which replaced the *flowing tracery* of Gothic times. Around it spread the churchyard

full of rank grass, huge docks and nettles, amongst which hideous tombstones, in every stage of decay, lay prone, or stood, in angles of all degrees, tottering to their fall. This might seem to some persons a subject of regret, inasmuch as, judging by the inscriptions on these monuments, nothing could exceed the exemplary virtues of the persons whose last resting-place they marked. The creed of these excellent persons or their friends could not well be gathered, either from the inscriptions or the emblems in Lowton churchyard. In all the length and breadth of it was not to be found one Christian symbol. There were, however, plenty of death's-heads and cross-bones; extinguished torches, broken columns, and other emblems of eternal death; so possibly the Lowtonites held with the Honourable Jack, that "if a fellah was dead, he was dead, and there was an end of him," and that the sooner he was covered up in churchyard mould and his grave hidden by docks and nettles the better.

Inside the church might be descried traces of its former beauty and majesty in the magnificent arches struggling up through the misshapen galleries, out of masses of pews of every shape and size that human pride, greed, and indevotion could contrive. At first sight the church seemed to terminate at the east end in a gigantic tower, or rather three towers, rising one above the other, and surmounted by a canopy. Should a visitor, however, succeed in threading his way through the wilderness of circumjacent pews, and thus penetrate behind this imposing edifice, he came upon the chief beauty, the crowning glory of Lowton Church—the squire's pew.

It was constructed of high wooden walls, painted oak-colour; carpeted with handsome Brussels; lined and cushioned with Utrecht velvet, and surrounded by crimson curtains on ornamental brass rods, screening the noble occupiers from the vulgar gaze. It would have contained fifty persons with ease; the persons who occasionally occupied and slumbered in it—seated in easy lounging chairs—were two—a gouty baronet and his aged wife.

A little in rear of this stately erection was another, as large and almost as splendid; only lined with cloth instead of velvet, and whose curtains were of moreen instead of silk. In this the butler, the housekeeper, and the lady's maid from the 'big house' 'attended Divine service,' when so disposed, and the weather was favourable; the other servants having other enclosures also very comfortably furnished, provided for them in case they should at any time feel inclined to sanction by their presence the services in Lowton Church.

Opposite the squire's pew was a similar withdrawing-room, arranged and furnished in much the same manner, only with green instead of crimson, thus affording a pleasing variety of colour.

This was the rectory pew, occupied on Sundays by the Rev. Mrs. Dean. At the extreme end of the narrow passage, between these comfortable apartments, was a small piece of furniture the use of which seemed at first sight doubtful. It was a little rickety table, covered with a moth-eaten, mangy-looking cloth that might once have been velvet. Its colour was an uncertain brown, but Mr. Pips, the clerk, was ready to swear it was red, and, of course, he knew. At either end of the little table stood an elbowed kitchen chair, containing a green baize cushion. Two mouldy-looking cushions rested on either end of the little table, and on one of these lay a book. In front of the table was a small piece of green carpet, covered with a large red pattern. It was half a small remnant discovered one day by thrifty Mrs. Dean among her stores. The remnant being larger than necessary, Mrs. Dean had cut it in half—one piece being laid down as described, at the east end of Lowton Church, and the other half in Mr. Dean's harness-room.

The piece of furniture we have described was, when spoken of by the people of Lowton, called "*the table*;" so perhaps it had some definite and special use. Over it was a sash window, and behind it certain dingy black boards, on which were inscribed the Creed, the LORD'S Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, surmounted by the royal arms.

The pews with which the whole of Lowton Church were blocked being as high as an ordinary man, it was not easy, or indeed possible, to take a general view of the interior and say what it did or what it did not contain. Some enterprising persons had once, however, made an exploring expedition in and out of every pew, and had brought back the (to some persons) surprising intelligence that Lowton Church possessed no font.

There had been a font once, no doubt, for there, in the place where it ought to have stood, were scars on the pavement now covered by a piece of Kidderminster carpet, indicating from whence it had been removed. It had happened that Farmer Traddles' pew had grown up round it; and the farmer's legs being long, and his wife's circumference considerable, they soon voted it "a mortal piece of lumber." The farmer could not stretch his legs, nor his wife expand her petticoats on account of it. True, it was handy to put hats and books in, but this did not compensate for the other disadvantages connected with it, so the farmer spoke about it one day at a vestry meeting, and the churchwardens agreeing that anything which hindered the full development of pews was not to be tolerated in a parish church, gave immediate orders for its removal, and being on the best possible terms with their rector, offered it to his lady as a flower-vase for her garden.

Mrs. Dean was charmed with the gift, and the font being a remarkably fine specimen of Norman times, was greatly admired, standing on the rectory lawn, filled with scarlet geraniums.

Its removal from the church proved an immense advantage to Mr. and Mrs. Traddles' pew, which became, henceforth, as commodious as any other in the church—always excepting, of course, those stately erections in what had once been called the chancel. And nobody missed it; for whenever a baptism took place at Lowton, Mrs. Pips, who was very good-natured, and whose house was conveniently near, brought in her slop-basin, which being placed on the little table we have mentioned, answered the purpose very well, and inconvenienced nobody.

Neither Mr. Borne nor Mr. Delarode thought it necessary to remove either their hats or cigars as they entered what in dark ages had been called the "House of God." They sauntered up to the east end—"chancel" it once had been—and while the Honourable Jack amused himself by trying to decipher the inscription on a quaint old monument which had survived the surrounding desolation, the Honourable Gerry, anxious to finish his cigar before disturbed by the approaching funeral, sat down in one of the kitchen chairs before mentioned, the dogs meantime dispersing themselves among the pews in keen pursuit of rats.

"Do you know anything about the Service, Jack?" asked the Rector of Babbleton-cum-Slop; "is it long? Find me a Prayer Book, if you can, old fellow."

The obliging Jack complied, stating, as he delivered the book to his Reverend friend, that he had certainly heard the Service read once or twice, on certain mournful occasions, but that he did not remember anything about it. He supposed, however, that the length of it would depend on the rate at which the officiating Minister was able to get through it. "But have you never had to read it at Babbleton?" he asked.

"My dear fellow, is it likely! when I give a Curate fifty pounds a year and the Rectory House! What would be the use of keeping a Curate, if I did this sort of thing myself?"

"The bell, sir," hinted the clerk submissively, looking out of the vestry door. "The funeral's a-coming up. It's a'most nigh the gate, sir."

The Honourable and Reverend gentleman groaned, threw away the remains of his cigar, and followed the clerk to the vestry, where Mr. Pips produced a something which he called "the surplus," and proceeded to hang it on the shoulders of the stately sportsman, and to button it round his throat.

But to this Mr. Borne objected in no very measured terms, "the

thing would do very well without being buttoned," he said, "otherwise it would disarrange his cravat."

"The beggars are very punctual," said the Honourable Jack, looking out of the vestry window; "they have halted at the gate; I suppose they are waiting for you. I'll tell you what, Gerry," he added, looking over his friend's shoulder, who was still studying the funeral service, "it is a pity you told Cordy to bring the tandem round so soon, you will never get through that, and put the blacksmith under ground in seven minutes, nor yet in ten."

"What will you bet?" asked the Honourable Gerry in a tone of confidence.

"A five pound note," was the reply.

"Done!" said the sportsman, "a five pound note that I can't read this—beginning from 'I am,' down to 'evermore'—in ten minutes."

"I'll time you," said the Honourable Jack, "I'll stand at the west door and time you. The bearers will crawl like snails, you'll see."

"Fair play, Jack. Remember time begins from 'I am.'"

Jack nodded, and the two men walked together down the church; the one to win his wager, the other to stand at the door and time him.

Meantime the funeral party, having halted at the gate, looked in vain for the "Parson" to meet them.

Indignation at this neglect dried Davis's tears, which had been flowing fast; and she looked this way and that, but no Priest could she see. At length Mr. Burt exclaimed, "Here he be." The bearers proceeded with their burden, and Mrs. Davis saw a very dashing looking man, in a shooting dress, head the procession, and heard him begin, in sharp, rapid tones, the solemn office for the dead. As he turned to precede them to the church, Davis saw hanging down his back something which looked like a dirty tablecloth.

"My stars!" was her mental ejaculation, "what strange people they must be in these parts. I suppose the Rector's away, and the Squire is taking his duty for him. But it's a pity, anyhow, he didn't put on the Parson's surplice."

The rattling pace at which he went through the Psalm augured well for Mr. Osman Borne's wager. The Psalm ended, he plunged headlong into the Chapter.

The gloomy, vault-like church, smelling of decay and mildew; the inquisitive little dogs that ran hither and thither sniffing at the bearers, and then dashing joyously out into the sunshine; the *strange, fashionable-looking man in a shooting dress gabbling*

through the Service, like a schoolboy reciting a prize essay, all formed so strange and inharmonious a contrast with the dead man sleeping in his coffin, and the rough, but kindly mourners standing round, that even Lydia's tears dried in wonder. All this, whatever it was, that was going on, seemed to have nothing at all to do with Mark.

It was different at the grave, however. This, thanks to Mr. Burt, had been dug close by their mother's; and when the pall was removed, and the coffin, on which was the name, "Mark Staunton," was being lowered into it, the child's agony burst forth in one piteous cry, "Oh, Mark, Mark."

The Honourable Reader paused. He was, in his way, a good-natured man, and the little girl's distress touched him.

The tandem came in grand style down the road, and stopped at the churchyard gate. He did not notice it, but paused; and this pause of compassion lost him the wager.

"I could not help it, Jack," he explained, when a few minutes afterwards he was bowling down the road towards Babbage. "That poor little thing's grief was enough to upset a man."

"Who was she?" asked Jack.

"His sister, Burt said."

"What, the girl that was spirited away by the Sisters?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she was not spirited away."

"Mrs. Crawley romanced then, did she?"

"Why, of course she did. These stories never bear looking into. You heard what she said about the man's end being hastened by the loss of his sister. And you know, and she knew, and all Low-ton knows, the poor fellow was kicked on the head by a horse he was going to shoe. And Burt tells me the man himself placed the girl with the Sisters, and paid from four to five shillings a week for her."

"Humph!" grunted Jack, in a tone of much discontent, "then we must give up the story."

"Give it up?" repeated Mr. Borne in much disdain. "Why so?"

"Simply because it has not a leg to stand upon."

The Honourable and Reverend Osman Borne laughed loud and long. "My dear, innocent, good fellow, have these 'no Popery' stories ever a leg to stand upon? And does not the 'World' find legs sufficient for all the anecdotes it admits into its columns? Give it up indeed! I shall not give it up. It is an excellent good story, and will tell."

"But you will have to modify it," objected Mr. Delarode, who for once seemed strangely scrupulous, "and that will spoil its edge."

"My dear, good fellow, leave it to me. I shall 'tell the tale' in the columns of the 'World' as 'it was told me;'—by Mrs. Crawley that is—I am not to know, and am too gallant to suppose, that the reverend lady told lies. The onus rests with her—I merely make public her statement. I ask no questions, and depend upon it the public will not. It is too good an opportunity of getting up a cry against Sisterhoods, and that fool Neville, to be neglected."

"Neville has a sharp pen, and might retaliate," observed Mr. Delarode. "If 'he tells the tale' as it really is, it would make us look rather foolish."

"My Jack, thou art maudlin," laughed the Honourable Mr. Borne. "Who but a fool would ever mention names in a 'no Popery' story? And if no names are mentioned, who can contradict it?"

Who indeed!

CHAPTER XLVI.

MRS. DAVIS ASKS A QUESTION.

"IS there ne'er a Parson in all these parts," asked the perplexed Mrs. Davis, "that the Squire does Parson's duty?"

The question was addressed to Mr. Burt, who had insisted on Mrs. Davis and Lydia accompanying him to his house to have some refreshment while his cart was being got ready to take them back to St. Mary's. Many of Lydia's former neighbours and cronies had collected at the blacksmith's house to see the little girl, sympathise with her, question her, and criticise her dress and appearance.

Though good-natured in their way, and disposed to show every kindness in their power to the orphan girl, they were, perhaps, on the whole rather disappointed to find how greatly she was improved in appearance, health, and manners. They gathered round her, plying her with questions as to her method of life and treatment at St. Mary's, and half-whispered inquiries as to who was her companion. Their disappointment was visibly increased by the information that Mrs. Davis was only the Chaplain's cook, and that Lydia was perfectly happy in her new home. The consideration, however, that she could not remain there, now that there was no one to pay for her, somewhat consoled them.

"Well, you see, my dear," said Mrs. Wickens cheerfully, "you'll have to come to the work-us for a while after all. Folk can't be

kept at boarding schools for nothing, can they, Mrs. Pips? And though you've growed, and look well I must say, yet you're too small to take any place as would downright keep you; ain't she, Mrs. Pips?"

Mrs. Pips shook her head, and gave it as her opinion that Lydia would have to be "took into the House for two years at least."

The child turned pale and sick with dismay. That she would have to leave St. Mary's had never for one instant occurred to her. At this very moment she was yearning to be back there again. It seemed impossible that it could cease to be her home because there was no one to pay for her. She said almost as much, but her kind friends hastened to assure her that no one could be kept for nothing except in "'Sylums or the House;" and that if she could not "be got into a 'Sylum, why she must go to the House." Lydia, in great distress, turned to appeal to Mrs. Davis, but she was deep in conversation with Mr. Burt, of whom Lydia stood too much in awe to venture to interrupt him.

Mrs. Davis was propounding to Mr. Burt the query with which this chapter commences. "Is there ne'er a Parson in all these parts, that the Squire does Parson's duty?"

"Bless you, ma'am," exclaimed the churchwarden, "that gentleman were a Parson! Not our own; he's in furrin parts. This here gentleman is a-taking of his duty through having hired a good deal of shooting in this neighbourhood. He's Rector of Babbleton-cum-Slop, and is a very great gun, he is; I don't mean in the matter of shooting," explained Mr. Burt, "though he's a first-rate shot too; but I mean as he gives lectures in town halls and such like on poetry, and langwidges, and all manner; and he preaches such sermons few folks can take them in, they be that clever—all about half the Bible not being true, and t'other half not to be took at all as 'tis writ. He gives us a deal of knowledge, he do; how there never were no Deluge, and Adam and Eve is all a mistake; and there ain't no such place as I won't mention; and as how as fresh discoveries like are always being made in science, so fresh discoveries will always go on a-being made in religion, and something new will be always a-turning up. So we mustn't nail our faith, says he, to this here book, or that there book, for the Bible is full of mistakes, and the Parliament might make a fresh Prayer Book to-morrow. O, he's a very great preacher, is Mr. Borne! When he preaches in London, bless you, ma'am, you wouldn't credit the crowds as go to hear him. They say he's safe to be a Bishop; for he's the son of a lord, and he writes long letters in the newspapers all about the best ways of making drains, and political economy, and such like. You'll see them all in the 'World' newspaper; fol-

think a deal of them, and all the ministers at court, and they as make bishops. You'll know his letters when you see them in the 'World,' ma'am, for they're always in bigger print than the rest, and he signs them G. O. B."

Mrs. Davis sat speechless, staring at her informant; then at length she said slowly, "Do you mean for to tell me that this G. O. B.'s a Priest?"

"Geraldyn Osman Borne, that's his name, ma'am," said Mr. Burt, "the Honourable and Reverend Geraldyn Osman Borne, son of the Earl of Talkington, Rector of Babbleton-cum-Slop, and the two hamlets adjoining—Scribbleton and Lye. Well, ma'am, as to his being a Priest, that I can't say, anyhow he's a Parson."

"But Parsons are Priests," persisted Mrs. Davis, who, not having had the advantage of attending Mr. Borne's discourses, thought she clinched the matter by adding authoritatively, "Look in your Prayer Book."

"Oh," said Mrs. Burt, coming to her husband's assistance, "I know he's not a Priest, for he said so himself; don't you remember, Ralph? Don't you remember his saying one day, soon after he come, that Christians hadn't no altars, and no sacrifices, and no priests, and no nothing; and how as sacraments was all very well in their way, but anything might be a sacrament—one thing as well as another, if you only looked at it that way; and as how one man was as good as another for the doing of services, only it was more orderly like for some to do them sort of things as their profession? And then he said at the end that he was thankful to say he weren't no Priest. Don't you remember, Ralph?" concluded Mrs. Burt, as if surprised at her husband's obliviousness.

Mr. Burt scratched his head. He was inwardly convinced he must have slept through this discourse which had made such an impression on his helpmate, but, being churchwarden, did not like to say so, and therefore avoided any such humiliating inference being drawn, by paying her a dexterous compliment.

"Why, what memories you ladies do have, surely!" he exclaimed, bowing at the same time to Mrs. Davis, to show that he included her in his eulogy. "Who'd have thought my missis now could have repeated a sermon off like that out o' hand!"

"Why," said Mrs. Burt candidly, "I don't suppose I should have remembered a word of it, but the only saucy words I ever had from poor Mark Staunton was about that very sermon. He took on about it that way I was quite surprised, and wanted for to prove to me that it was none of it true. I said I didn't care, and it wasn't no concern of his; and he said it was everybody's concern. And whilst we was a-talking, Mr. Pips he come in and told

Mark as how he was an ignorant chap ; for that Mr. Borne had written all that in the 'World' newspaper, in two or three long letters, with 'G. O. B.' at the end, so every one knew they was his, and all the gentlefolk said as they was so wonderful clever ; and some of the quality about Kirkminster was a-going to get up a testimonial for him. And Mark he said, what had that got to do with it ? and we was quite surprised at his impudence, and put him down finely, I can tell you." Here Mrs. Burt remembered Lydia's presence, and stopped suddenly.

" Ah," said Mr. Burt, solemnly shaking his head, " Mark was a good fellow, but he'd no headpiece !"

Perhaps we may as well here mention that in due time there appeared a very sensational article in the 'World' newspaper, calling attention to a letter in another portion of its columns. This letter contained a thrilling narrative from the pen of Mr. Osman Borne, all the *dramatis personæ* of which were admirably conceived.

There was a young budding maiden, in the spring of womanhood, keeping her brother's house, and performing with admirable fidelity all the duties of life. That was Lydia Lee. There was a wicked priest, a compound of vagabond, knave, and fool, who set on foot an artful plot to tempt this fair maiden from her brother's protection into a conventual establishment, of which he was the head. That was Mr. Neville. He was assisted in his nefarious designs by a 'Sister of Mercy,' a creature wholly devoid of every womanly feeling. That was Sister Mabel. There was a broken-hearted brother besetting the nunnery with fruitless prayers and tears, and leaving nothing undone, so said the letter, to procure the liberation of his unfortunate sister, and, finally, dying prematurely from grief at his ill success. That was Mark Staunton. There was a band of horrible creatures, somewhat in the style of the witches in Macbeth, only habited as nuns, and calling themselves 'Sisters,' who looked on unmoved at the agonies of their victims. These, it is to be presumed, were the Mother Superior, and the Sisters Mabel, Rachel, and Ruth.

The story created a profound sensation ; and as strong a feeling against Sisterhoods as the Honourable and Reverend writer could have desired. It was eagerly read and devoutly believed wherever the 'World' was circulated, and that may be said to have been wherever the English language was spoken.

The fame of the Honourable and Reverend G. O. Borne as a newspaper correspondent rose higher than ever. He had proved he could write on subjects ecclesiastical as well as political and social. The "Amalgamated Protestants" claimed him as their champion, their "organs" devoted leader after leader to his praise.

Country gentlemen voted addresses of thanks to him for unmasking the horrible jesuitry that held them in continual terror, lest some night, when the moderator lamp burnt low, they might find a weird Sister of Mercy crouching on their hearthstone, or a priest in full canonicals in a cupboard upstairs.

No one could doubt that it was the Honourable and Reverend Geraldyn Osman Borne, who had performed this duty towards his country; that he was the author of this able and telling letter; for it was printed in leading type, and it bore his signature, "G. O. B."

CHAPTER XLVII.

VERY NAUGHTY.

MRS. Davis was so amazed by the doctrinal and rubrical peculiarities of Lowton, with which she had that day become acquainted, that she was very silent all the way home; and, perhaps, to this cause may be also attributed the fact that she noticed nothing peculiar in the clinging grasp with which Lydia held her hand, or the manner in which she crept closer to her side when the tower of St. Mary's first came in view.

By Mrs. Davis's orders Mr. Burt's man drove the cart up to the orphanage door; but there Sister Ruth met them, and whispered to Davis that Lydia was to be taken back to the Chaplain's house. As they drove on to it Lydia's fears became too painful to be any longer suppressed. "Are they sending me away, am I not to go back?" she asked imploringly, clinging with both hands to her kind companion.

"Send you away! Bless the child! what do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Davis.

"There is no one to pay now," murmured the little girl. Davis stared at her for a moment as if she did not apprehend her meaning. Then a light seemed to break upon her, and, with a very reassuring smile, she answered, "Well, there now, I'm not the Mother Superior nor yet the Sisters, so I can't say nothing at all about what they'll do. Only I don't think, if I was you, that I'd put myself in any fuss at all about it."

The words were not much, but the manner was everything. Lydia sighed with relief, and returned Mrs. Davis's kiss with interest. She shook hands with the man that had driven her home, and who had been one of Mark's bearers, and stood talking to him quite cheerfully whilst Davis went to fetch him some beer. And when she

found herself once more in the scrupulously clean little kitchen, which was Davis's delight and pride, her misgivings about having to leave St. Mary's had passed away as if they had never been.

But meantime a doubt had sprung up in Davis's mind: a doubt as to whether the Superiors of St. Mary's would altogether approve of Lydia having parted with her medal. These medals, she knew, were strictly untransferable, and in the event of the holder of one of them dying, the medal was always returned to the Mother Superior. "Now what ever will the Mother say, I wonder," pondered Mrs. Davis. And she thought she had better ascertain this immediately, before taking off her bonnet and shawl.

The Superior listened with much interest to her account of the whole transaction, and assured her she had done perfectly right. "Tell Mr. Neville this little incident when you return," she added; "and I will send down another medal and ribbon for him to give the child before she comes back here. I suppose you know that Mrs. Neville has very kindly arranged to keep Lydia at the parsonage for another week or ten days. We thought it would be too great a trial coming back at once among her companions with such a heavy grief on her poor little heart."

"God bless you, Mother," said Davis fervently. "The child took on when she first heard she was to go home with me instead of coming back here at once, she thought she was going to be sent away from St. Mary's, because, as she said, 'there was no one now to pay.'"

"Poor little soul," said the Superior, "she need not fear our turning her adrift. Please God, we will do our best to supply the place of those relatives who have been for some wise purpose taken from her. But will she be in your way at the parsonage, Davis?"

"Dear no, ma'am!" exclaimed Davis, "she's as welcome as the day." With this assurance Mrs. Davis prepared to depart; but first she took out of her pocket the lock of hair she had brought from Lowton, and asked the Mother to give it to Sister Mabel.

"What is this?" said the Mother smiling, "some crotchet of Sister Mabel's?"

"No, ma'am, not a crotchet," replied Davis simply, "it's a lock of Mark's hair, which Sister Ruth told me, when she called me back to give me the shirt, Sister Mabel wanted me to cut off very particular."

"She shall have it," said the Superior still smiling, and placing the lock of hair for safety in her pocket-book.

Ten quiet, happy days Lydia spent under Davis's fostering care at the Chaplain's house. She was really happy, for the novelty of her life during that short time had some fascination in it. But

when on the tenth day she returned amongst her former companions, wearing the new medal and ribbon which Mr. Neville gave her at parting, she felt a change had come over her, and that her life could never again be as it had been.

Her return was on a Sunday morning, and the affectionate greetings and thoughtful kindness of her companions made that day pleasant enough. But on the Monday when she set herself to her accustomed tasks, they seemed a weariness and burden to her.

Both Davis and Emma had on leave-taking, expressed a hope to Lydia that she would prove her "gratitude" to the Mother and Sisters for keeping her at St. Mary's by "being a good girl;" and on the very Monday morning on which she recommenced her lessons, Miriam, the pupil teacher in whose class she was, made a similar remark.

"I'm sure you haven't taken any pains with your copy to-day," she said in her usual blunt straightforward way; "and you ought to remember that you are specially bound to do your very best now, Lydia, out of gratitude to the Sisters for giving you a home here."

It was undoubtedly true, Lydia did not dispute it, and would have been puzzled to explain why she winced so at Miriam's words. Yet wince she did: and she even found herself wishing that she could still be "paid for," so that "gratitude" might not be claimed from her as a debt. She made up her mind, however, that this feeling must be "very naughty," that in fact she must be "very naughty" altogether; and, trying to rouse herself, she begged Miriam's pardon after school for the ill-written copy, and determined to be more painstaking in her work.

But her resolutions came to nothing; resolves, endeavours, seemed of no use. All zest, all pleasure had died out of her tasks and employments; she said to herself there was no one to work for now. True she loved Sister Mabel dearly, she wished to please her; but then she was *expected*. to please, this was set before her as something she *must* do, it was the price she was to pay for her home at St. Mary's, and the little lonely heart felt all the more lonely in consequence. Love and gratitude had ceased to be a free offering. She prized Sister Mabel's love indeed; she would not have forfeited it for the world; but it did not satisfy her now. There were so many to share it, it was not exclusively hers; she was but a unit among many: she had lost the heart that had seemed all her own, and the aching void deadened and numbed her energies.

It is not to be supposed that Lydia was able to analyse her own feelings in the same way we have done; she could not tell why it *was she* felt so listless and sad, that her employments had become

a heavy burden, and even play a weariness. But so it was; she became fretful and peevish in the playground with those who thwarted her; selfish and exacting to those who pitied and yielded to her; and in class and at work listless, indolent, and seemingly indifferent.

Miriam's patience failed at last, and she complained. Sister Ruth, too, shook her head over the now slovenly needlework. Sister Mabel counselled forbearance, "There has been a great shock," she said, "we must have patience till the little heart has had time to settle itself again."

Miriam acquiesced with a dissatisfied sigh, and murmured to Sister Ruth that for her part she believed Lydia had been "spoiled." Sister Ruth reiterated Sister Mabel's exhortation to patience, but in her heart agreed with Miriam. The very day after giving this counsel, the Sister Superior was called away from the orphanage on urgent business; and as it was possible that her absence might extend to a fortnight or more, Sister Louise was formally installed as head of the orphanage till her return.

If anything could comfort the children for even a temporary loss of their own motherly Sister, it was the appointment of Sister Louise, whom they all loved, and who was thoroughly up in orphanage management, having continually helped Sister Mabel in her charge. But this feeling was not shared by Lydia. Sister Louise was comparatively a stranger to her, and now that the strong bond of personal love to Sister Mabel, which had hitherto kept her tolerably straight, was removed, she did worse than ever both in lessons and work, and her indifference almost amounted to sullenness.

Sister Mabel, when giving her parting directions, had particularly commended Lydia to her deputy's care, and Sister Louise, therefore, overlooked many things which otherwise would have received her censure. But when she found this leniency produced no fruit, that day after day the same faults were repeated, her sense of justice was outraged, and sending for the delinquent one morning after school, she reproved her somewhat sharply, and showing her the marks standing against her name in the conduct-book, asked her what she thought Sister Mabel would feel when she saw such a disgraceful record.

Lydia was momentarily struck with compunction; such marks had never disgraced her before, and she felt grief at the thought that the sight of them would disappoint Sister Mabel. Unhappily, however, Sister Louise's next words drove this feeling out of her heart, and recalled the sullen indifference which was settling upon her.

"You know, Lydia, this conduct is the worse in you, because you

are so specially bound to show gratitude for all the kindness that has been shown you. Where would you be now if the Mother had not given you a home here? and what a return is this that you are making her for her goodness to you!"

"Gratitude." Oh, how Lydia felt she hated that word! It signified to her a bondage which crippled her. It was a yoke under which she chafed; a burden she longed to cast aside. "Where should I be?" thought this naughty little girl in response to Sister Louise's question. "I'm sure I don't know, and I don't care; I know I wish I was somewhere where I needn't be grateful!"

Here was a dreadful state of things! No wonder with such feelings the record in the mark-book showed no amendment in Lydia's conduct: and that the children pronounced that she had really become "quite naughty."

Rose was greatly concerned. "You will lose your red ribbon, Lydia," said she, "if you do not take care. You have bad marks every day."

"I don't care," was Lydia's unexpected answer.

"Don't care!" why not?" exclaimed Rose indignantly.

But Lydia shook herself free, and rushing away to a lonely corner of the playground, burst passionately into tears as her heart answered the question to herself. "Because there is no one in particular to work for now; no one person to care very much whether I am good or not. No one would miss me if I wasn't here. There would be room for another if I was dead or away. Rose has other friends. Even she wouldn't care very much; and Sister Mabel has such a lot of children to look after and love, she wouldn't miss me. There's no one to care, no one to work for. I am all alone!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SISTER MABEL'S VIEWS.

NOVEMBER was drawing to a close before Sister Mabel was able to return to her little flock. Great were their rejoicings over her appearance among them, as they pressed eagerly round her to kiss her hands and dress in their importunate affection. Only Lydia stood aloof. The knowledge of those terrible entries in the mark-book which Sister Mabel would next day see, made her feel there was a barrier between them, and she shrank back. The Sister did not seem to notice this, but the next time the child passed

near her she stroked her hair caressingly, saying merrily, "Well, little woman, and how are you?"

Lydia took the dear hand in hers and pressed it to her lips; in another moment she would have thrown herself into the Sister's arms, and wept out all her sorrow; but the thought that she was expected to be "grateful," and yet had been very much the reverse, checked her; and some of her companions dancing up to the Sister just then, brought back the thought to her mind how many there were to love and be loved, and that no one would miss her. So she dropped the kind hand she held, and crept away.

The following day, just after morning school, Lydia with a feeling of heart-sickness, saw Sister Mabel take up and proceed to examine that dreadful conduct-book! She was still in her place, slowly and listlessly correcting a very faulty dictation lesson, but as Sister Mabel opened the book, the slate seemed to vanish from before her. Her cheeks began to burn and her heart to beat; once only she looked up furtively, Sister Mabel's eyes were fixed upon her, and she dared not look again. She bent closer over her slate, but her thoughts were far away. "Sister Mabel will leave off caring for me altogether now," she thought, "and then I shall have no one—no one at all," and the hot tears dropping on her slate, rendered the unhappy dictation lesson more incorrect than before. The dinner-bell rang, and it was as far from correction as ever.

"Really, Lydia," exclaimed Miriam, whose patience had been sorely tried that day, "you don't deserve to be allowed to come in to dinner. I'm sure if Sister Mabel knew how careless and inattentive you have been, she would not allow you to. I would report you, only I don't like to worry Sister the very first day she is back."

"You need not fear worrying me, my dear," said a voice close beside them. "Why have not you and Lydia taken your places for dinner?"

The indignant Miriam showed the miserable dictation, and reported her pupil's serious misdemeanours.

Sister Mabel looked very grave. "It is impossible to correct this lesson now, it is so blotted and blurred." She took up the slate-cloth and wiped it all out. "As soon as you have finished dinner, Lydia, you will make a fair copy of this from the book; you will show it to me first, and then take it up to Miriam, and beg her pardon for having been so troublesome. Now go to dinner."

"Have I been cross and hasty, Sister?" whispered Miriam anxiously, as she followed the Sister to the refectory.

"No, my love; but forget this matter now, it will all come right; and in spite of appearances, take my word that your little companion is not so naughty as she seems."

Miriam thought this rather hard to believe, but determined she would not let her provocations cause any coolness between herself and Lydia. Indeed so little malice did she bear, that when she and the rest of the children were equipped after dinner for a pleasant walk with Sister Rachel, she felt quite sorry to see Lydia sitting down tearfully to her writing, and would have begged her off, but that she knew Sister Mabel never altered any sentence she had once pronounced.

"She has been spoiled, my Sister," said Sister Ruth, observing that Lydia had been left behind by the walking party in disgrace.

"Not yet, I hope," replied Sister Mabel cheerfully; "though I admit she is on the high road to it."

"Not now?" said Sister Ruth; "I am very fond of the child, but a little punishment will do her good; we indulged her too much whilst her trouble was fresh upon her, poor little thing; and the result is that she has become so idle and indifferent there is no doing anything with her."

"That may be a result, but not of the indulgence we showed her," observed Sister Mabel.

"Of what, then, my Sister? I never saw a child so changed. She seems to hate work, and does not care to play."

"She has lost her object," replied the Superior of the orphanage. "Who can work, or play either, without an object? Could you, Ruth?"

Sister Ruth looked puzzled. "My little Sister," said her Superior, drawing her to her, and pressing a kiss upon her forehead, "could you or I plod on day after day doing the same duties over and over again in monotonous succession if we had no object—if the very mainspring of our actions were not an intense desire to please One, Whose love is more to us than life itself?"

"Oh, no," replied Sister Ruth.

"But we did not always aim so high," continued the Sister Superior. "We began with aims and objects nearer earth; eh, Ruth?"

"Yes, my Sister."

"We always had *some* object?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, and so had this little creature, and she has lost it, and she is now like a rudderless boat on the waters of life. No work is done in this world without an object, Ruth, not even a dictation lesson. And the spring of all actions is invariably one of two kinds of love—love of others, or love of self. An ambitious pupil will doubtless turn out an excellent scholar, great things have been done for simple love of self. But the motive is so utterly low and *worthless*, that I, for one, care for none of its results, however bril-

liant. The really grand ambition is that which does its best for the sake of another, without a thought of self. This little child possessed that innocent ambition in an eminent degree. She desired to excel that she might serve and please another. Her object has been removed, and she now sees no use in anything she does."

The kind Lay Sister looked greatly concerned. "Poor little thing!" said she. "Well, as we cannot bring her brother back again, we must try to give her higher motives, and make her a religious child; then she will work for the love of God."

"My dear little Sister," said the Superior of the orphanage, "since the world began, no human being has ever made another 'religious.' We cannot make plants grow," she added, smiling at the surprise she saw depicted in the Lay Sister's countenance; "we can but tend and train them. And it is the same with human souls. We cannot drag their affections up, and fix them at once on God; they must grow to that height spontaneously, increased and strengthened daily by the hidden life within—a life, my Sister, which we are, unhappily, able to destroy, but which it is altogether out of our power to supply. But though we cannot make a plant grow, we can influence the direction of its growth. We may gather in its vigorous shoots and bind them down till it becomes—if I may use such a word in a vegetable sense—self-concentrated; and we may train it on the ground, and counteract the natural upward tendency of its shoots; or we may supply it with little props and stays suited to its strength, raising it gently higher and higher as we see it becomes more vigorous, trusting that if we do this with faithful care, the inward vitality, it is not ours to give, will supply all the rest. Does my Sister understand me?"

Ruth thought she did, but she seemed doubtful; she still clung to the idea that it was possible, by some process or other, which she did not define, to make children "religious-minded."

Sister Mabel smiled and stroked her cheek. "It is possible, my love, to have green peas and strawberries in winter, but the poor, forced plants are in such an exhausted condition afterwards that a blast of cool air would soon finish them off. For my part, I would rather have the natural produce of the natural plants reared under God's own sky, and nourished with natural rain from Heaven. In the Garden of the LORD there must be no forcing-houses, Ruth; His plants must yield Him their fruits in 'due season.' Premature leaves and blossoms are no signs of good health. Remember the barren fig-tree; though covered with leaves, 'the time of figs was not yet.'"

"But what will you do, my Sister, about Lydia?" asked Sister Ruth, after a momentary pause, during which she seemed to be fathoming her Superior's meaning.

"Get her to finish that punishment task as well and as quickly as possible, instead of dawdling over it in the 'don't care' manner she is doing now. That will be the first step. Then I shall find for her an *object* which shall supply the stimulus she has lost. Trust me there will be no bad marks in the conduct-book to-morrow."

"I believe you can do anything, my Sister," exclaimed Sister Ruth in the fulness of admiring love, "but if you manage that!—"

"I hope I am not conceited," said Sister Mabel, smiling, "but I know the ground I have to work upon, and I think I shall succeed. This is a crisis in this little girl's life: she will now become either 'very naughty,' or else, in common parlance, 'very good.' I am pretty confident that the result will be—'very good.'"

CHAPTER XLIX.

SISTER MABEL'S REMEDY.

"**N**OW, little woman, is not that writing done yet? Why, what a slow coach you are!"

The words were Sister Mabel's, and addressed to Lydia, who looked up in utter astonishment into the Sister's smiling face. The next words amazed her still more, and fairly startled her out of her dawdling.

"Make haste and finish it quickly and well. 'Well,' remember, that Miriam may be perfectly satisfied you have done your best, and then bring it to me in my room before the children come home. I have something for you there, a little present."

"A little present!" Lydia fancied she must be dreaming. Here was she feeling herself hopelessly and helplessly naughty over her ill-done task, and yet Sister Mabel spoke to her as pleasantly and merrily as if she had been the best child in the orphanage. Had Sister Mabel desired her to come to her room to have a good whipping Lydia thought she should not have been at all surprised, but "a little present!"

Unable to penetrate this mystery she nevertheless answered with great alacrity that her writing would soon be done; which, indeed, it was, and very well too, as Sister Mabel remarked, when the little girl presented herself before her with a countenance expressive of mingled doubt and surprise.

"It is a pity you gave Miriam so much trouble this morning, but we will talk of that presently. Put the slate where it will not

get rubbed ; and as soon as the walking party come in take it to Miriam, and beg her pardon for having vexed her to-day.

Lydia coloured, looked down, and was silent. She was considering whether such an apology would satisfy Miriam, seeing she had vexed her every day for several weeks past ; she was wondering, moreover, whether Sister Mabel could really be cognisant of all her ill doings. If so, why did she treat her as if nothing had been amiss ?

"You will beg Miriam's pardon?" said the Sister, rather anxiously, not understanding the cause of the little girl's hesitation.

"Oh, yes, Sister," replied Lydia fervently.

"That is right. Now here is your present." Sister Mabel took from the table a small parcel very neatly wrapped in white paper and sealed with small red seals. As she did so, however, she accidentally dislodged a book, which fell at Lydia's feet, who, stooping to pick it up, recognised in dismay the hated conduct-book.

"Ah," said Sister Mabel noticing the crimson flush which mounted to the child's forehead, and her confused and troubled look, "there are some very strange entries against your name there, Lydia; you must explain them to me presently; but never mind that now. Put the book on the table, and open your parcel."

"It is impossible she can know how very naughty I have been," thought Lydia. But it was also impossible to feel much alarm in presence of Sister Mabel's bright smile, and the little girl turned to examine the packet with a much lighter heart.

Sister Mabel watched her with moistened eyes as, when the cover was removed, she uttered a cry of joy, and stood for a few moments lost in delighted surprise. Then, without a thought of bad marks, or any other trouble, the child threw herself into the Sister's arms and covered her cheeks with kisses and tears.

What had she found in the little white parcel that had so greatly moved her ?

A card, in the centre of which, fastened with a knot of red ribbon, was that lock of Mark's hair cut off by Mrs. Davis. It was surrounded by a painted wreath of forget-me-nots; over it were the words neatly illuminated, "Thy brother shall rise again;" and underneath the text, "Them also which sleep in JESUS will God bring with Him." The card was framed and glazed like a little picture, and it had moreover a ring by which it might be hung up.

"Oh, Sister, how dear, how good you are!" sobbed the little girl.

"I did this for you whilst I was away," said the Sister pressing her to her heart, "you see I do not forget my children."

"Oh, Sister!"

It was a November day, and therefore not a particularly bright one, but Lydia thought that the room seemed to have grown brighter and warmer since she first entered it.

She examined her little treasure again; and again and again expressed by her caresses her thanks for the thoughtful love which had provided it for her. Then Sister Mabel gave her the key of the dormitory, and bade her go and hang it up beside the portrait of her mother, and afterwards return to her.

Lydia joyfully obeyed. She lingered awhile in the dormitory, but it was with a brighter face than had been hers for many weeks that she finally returned to Sister Mabel's room. Again she felt the power of that strong sympathy with children's hearts which so peculiarly characterised Sister Mabel, and it drew her towards the Sister with an indescribable feeling of confidence and rest.

Sister Mabel asked a few questions about the new addition to the dormitory, how it looked, and so forth, as if to set the child completely at her ease; and then taking the mark-book in her hand, leant back in her chair and said in a tone as if it were a matter of small consequence, "Well, now about these marks in the conduct-book; I do not understand them. What do they mean? See, here under the head 'lessons' are such marks as, 'idle,' 'idle,' 'idle,' 'very bad,' 'indifferent,' 'very bad, kept in after school,' and so forth; all down the page, and the needlework is no better. Now, my love, what does this mean? You can do your lessons very well, and you can work very well, so what does all this mean?"

Lydia stood silent, she could not tell. She knew she had felt "idle," and "indifferent," and "bad;" and had a consciousness that she should for some unexplained reason continue to do so; but she could not explain why?

"I thought," said Sister Mabel, after waiting in vain for an answer, "I thought you were so anxious to please Mark."

Lydia stared.

"Am I mistaken?"

"No, Sister, but—"

"But what?"

"He is—dead," faltered the wondering child.

"What does that mean?" asked Sister Mabel with one of those winning smiles that seemed to light up everything with sunshine.

Lydia's eyes opened wider.

"I suppose it means," continued the Sister, "that he will not be able to come and see you any more on visiting days."

"Yes, Sister."

"But supposing he had gone to Australia, quite the other side of the world, you know; should you have left off trying to please him then?"

"Oh, no."

"Then why now? why leave off now?"

"Sister, it is so different."

"How different? He would not have been able to come and see you on visiting days, had he gone to Australia."

"No, but he would have been alive, and some day I might have seen him again."

"But is he not alive now? and will you not one day see him again?"

It broke upon her now,—the Sister's meaning, and the remembrance of the talk she had one day had on this very subject with Sister Ruth and her companions, and afterwards with Mark himself. Lydia felt sure now that the sun must be shining into the room, a feeling of hope and joy seemed to spring up in her heart as if its rays had touched that also. She slid herself on to the Sister's lap, and passed her arm round her neck. "Sister, I know what you mean, but I did not think—it seems so strange—I could only think of him as I saw him, Sister; and now—" tears prevented her completion of the sentence.

"And now," said the Sister finishing it for her, "as lying down in that deep dark grave in Lowton churchyard."

Lydia shuddered and clung closer to the fond arm that encircled her. "Yes, Sister; and sometimes when I woke at night, and remembered that I could never see him again, and never hear him speak, I prayed God to bring him back, but I knew he could not come."

"Poor darling!" murmured the Sister in parenthesis.

"And, Sister, when I heard the wind and rain, and knew he was lying there all alone, I wanted to go to him, and I could not play, Sister, I could not laugh with the rest, because it seemed so shocking to be happy when he was lying there."

"And you did not care to work because there was no one to work for now, eh, Lydia?"

"No, Sister."

"But, Lydia, when you last stood by your brother's side did you not feel that he was not there? that he who had been as a father and mother to you, who had loved, and planned, and thought for you, was not there at all?"

Sister Mabel's words so exactly described the feeling the child remembered to have experienced when she had taken that well-remembered kiss, that she looked up wondering in the Sister's

face as she assented, marvelling how Sister Mabel could have guessed her thought.

"Well then, my darling, think of that grave no more. The shell, the husk, the seed is there, waiting painlessly, quietly, to be raised a glorious body. But the living, loving Mark is not there. He is no more separated from you than if he had been obliged to go to another country. And you have the comfort of knowing that no harm, no sorrow can befall him where he is; your little heart need never sicken with anxiety for him as it might have done had miles of country or the dreary sea stretched between him and you. He had finished the task of life his GOD had given him to do, and the LORD has called him home, that is all. He did his best for love of GOD and you; my little girl, will you not now do your best in the task of life your GOD has set you, for love of GOD and him?"

It was delightful to see how, as the Sister's words of love and hope fell on the ear of the listening child, the light dawned in her large dark thoughtful eyes, and the flush of returning happiness mantled in the pale sad cheek. But she did not speak. She lay with her head on the Sister's shoulder making this blessed truth her own, trying to realise it in the depths of her heart—Mark was alive, not dead.

The Sister did not disturb her, she saw it was sinking like healing dew into the hungry little soul. But presently a look of perplexity clouded the soft dark eyes. "Can I please him still, Sister?" said the child suddenly. "Will he know if I try to please him?"

"As much as he could know if he were in a foreign country. And you said you should not leave off trying to please him if he had happened to have sailed for the other side of the world."

"No, Sister, but then I could have written to him, and though he mightn't have been able to read the letter himself, because you know, Sister, he was not a good scholar, yet some one—some friend—might have read it to him, and then he would have known how much I loved him, and that I was trying to please him."

"Certainly; but how do we know that some One—some Friend—will not tell him now what would give him so much pleasure? The actual state of those whom GOD has called away is hidden from us, Lydia; but of one thing we may be sure—that those who died loving GOD are safe, quite safe with the GOD of Love; and that they who loved us on earth must love us a great deal better when they are with Him, because He loves us so; and they love all whom He loves, because they love Him so. Now there is nothing that you do well, because it is *right* to do it, that GOD's eye does not see, and all such actions, even in the youngest child, give Him pleasure; is it not

very likely, then, that all we do that pleases God is communicated to those to whom it would afford such great happiness to know, that, those whom they loved so dearly here, are pleasing Him Who is their Life, their Glory there, and will one day be with them where He is?"

Again the child lay still, taking this also like balm into her heart; and as she pondered, the love of the now unseen brother became mingled with love of the unseen God. That which would please the one would please the other. It was no difficulty to her to realise the personality of the absent brother; and dimly there dawned upon her the glorious consciousness of the *Personality* of the absent LORD. True, this consciousness was but dawning now, but it would grow to perfect fulness hereafter.

"It would have been so sad," continued the Sister presently, "if, supposing Mark had been obliged to go away to a foreign country, you had immediately left off trying to please him, and so disappointed all his hopes and plans for you. And, I think, it would be sadder still if now, because he is away from you, and unable to have any direct communication with you, you should disappoint all his dearest hopes and wishes, and render the loving sacrifices he made for you of no effect."

This was a new view of the matter altogether, and the little girl roused herself in much distress.

"Oh, I did not think of that," she cried, "and I have been so naughty. Sister, I don't think I've had one good mark since you've been away. I have been troublesome to Miriam every day, and my work has been so bad, twice I've had to pick out every stitch; and I did not care to do anything right. Oh, Sister, I have been so naughty, what shall I do?"

"Stay, my love, I don't think you need distress yourself so. I do not think you have been intentionally naughty; but I think you have been acting under a great mistake. You have been fancying that there was nothing worth working for, and so you have been idle and listless. But now all that is over. You see, now, that you have been mistaken. You are going to turn over a new leaf, and try to please Mark as much as ever you did. I will explain your mistake to Sister Louise and Sister Ruth, and you will show them that it is at an end now; and you will beg Miriam's pardon for the trouble you have given her, and get to the top of your class as soon as possible. So now let us see what we can do with this conduct-book." Sister Mabel took out her pencil. "Look, Lydia, I am going to strike out everyone of these unfortunate marks, because, you see, they were given while you were allowing that unhappy mistake of yours to make you so miserable. There, the marks are

all struck out now, and will go for nothing. We will start quite fresh from this afternoon."

Lydia could scarcely believe her eyes or ears. An immense burden seemed at once rolled off her mind, and smiles began to sparkle through her tears.

"We cannot let these wretched notices, 'idle,' 'bad,' 'indifferent,' 'very bad,' stand here, can we?" pursued Sister Mabel, "it would be such a grief to Mark."

"Oh, I will never have bad marks again," sobbed the little girl.

"Certainly not," said the Sister, "and that for more reasons than one. First, for fear of disappointing Mark; and, secondly, because now you are not paid for, but adopted as our own dear little girl, you are quite one of ourselves, this has become your very own home just as your mother's cottage used to be, and you must feel that it is as much your own as that ever was. And so, as you are now my very own child, I shall expect you to help me very much; I shall count on your assistance as much as I used to do on Carrie's. You must be a second Carrie."

"Oh, Sister, how?" This was quite different from compulsory gratitude, and Lydia was captivated by the prospect of real usefulness suggested to her.

"Why, a new little orphan has been elected into St. Mary's. She is very small and sickly, and I fear very backward and ignorant. Her father and mother are both dead, and she has lived nearly all her life with her grandmother. But this poor old woman can now no longer work for her to support her, so a kind lady is going to place the little girl here. She will, I know, be very shy, for she has never been away from her grandmother before, and I think we shall all scare her out of her wits at first. Though she is so small and backward she is nearly eight, so she is too old for St. Joseph's and must come here among girls so much older and forwarder than herself. Now I am going to give her into your charge. I want you to take care of her and protect her, and teach her how to make her bed, and all those other little things she must learn here. Then before she comes I want you to look through all the clothes that Sister Ruth will put out for her, and see that they are in thorough repair. The stockings will want mending I know, as I cannot afford her new ones, and so she must take those which Minnie has outgrown. And after she has come, as she will be far behind every girl in the school, I want you to take her by herself every morning, and teach her her letters, for she knows nothing at all yet, and so get her on by degrees till she is able to take her place in the lowest class."

Sister Mabel paused and smiled, for Lydia, unable any longer to repress her delight at these arrangements, clapped her hands and

laughed aloud with pleasure. "But the mistress must not have any bad lesson marks herself, or the pupil will not care to learn from her."

"Oh, no, Sister, dear Sister, I will not indeed; how very very nice, oh, I wish she was come." And Lydia jumping off the Sister's knee, performed a sort of dance of delight, and then came back again. If Sister Mabel had ever doubted the success of her scheme it was impossible to have any misgivings about it now. Already Lydia was transformed, her face was radiant, her head erect, her every movement full of vigour and joy.

"She must sleep in the bed next to you, because you know you will be responsible for her. Lizzie Barrett must move down to the bed that is empty, and give hers up to your child. And you must explain to her all the rules, and especially the one about not speaking in bed. Then you will have to teach her her prayers, and hymns, and her catechism on Sundays. In short, you must be her little *Mother*."

Lydia's happiness was now too great for words, and she silently caressed the sweet face that smiled so lovingly upon her.

"What is her name?" she whispered softly.

"Mary Bell."

"Mary!" exclaimed the little 'Mother,' looking grave with the anxieties of her new position. "How very unfortunate. We have so many Marys. How shall we distinguish her? Has she no other name, Sister?"

"No, she is only 'Mary.'"

"Dear me! how unlucky. There's Mary Stephens, we call her 'Mary,' and Mary Dolby we call 'Dolly,' and Mary Carter, 'Polly,' and Mary Finch, 'Molly,' and Mary Pratt, 'Merry,' and Mary Unwin, 'Minnie,' what shall we call Mary Bell?"

"Suppose you call her 'May,' 'May' is a very usual abbreviation of 'Mary,' and it seems to speak of sweet spring days, when everything is bright and beautiful and glad and gay. In foreign countries the month of May is called the 'Month of Mary,' so May seems to remind us of her who was the sweetest, purest flower the spring of the LORD's first Advent caused to blossom on this earth. And 'May Bell' in German means a lily of the valley, or as they used to be called in olden times, 'Our Lady's bells.' So you must pray that your little 'May' may be a true child of Mary, a true lily of the valley, spotless and pure, shedding around her the odour of a holy life."

The walking party had already come in and settled to their work Sister Mabel's orders having been that they should not wait for her,

¹ Maigböckchen.

but that afternoon school should open under the auspices of Sister Louise. So all were intent on their respective employments when Lydia stole softly into her place. Few noticed her entrance; but those who sat near her were struck with the change in her appearance and deportment. Never had her eyes looked brighter; never had her fingers flown more nimbly and dexterously over her work. Sister Ruth watched her with surprise; and smiled in kind approval when the child showed up her stitching. "It is very well done indeed," she said with emphasis, "very well done indeed."

And once again words of praise brought joy to Lydia's heart, because she was 'once again' working for love's sake.

"What have you done, my Sister?" asked Sister Ruth that evening in amazement. "How have you worked this wonder?"

The children were at high games, and Lydia's gentle laugh rang joyously as she joined in them with all her former mirth and activity.

Sister Mabel turned upon her questioner eyes full of that silent laughter which spoke of the wealth of sunshine in her loving heart.

"I have given her her first lesson of faith in an unseen love; and I have found her an object for her present life. Not one for her to cling to, but one of which she must herself be the support and guide."

CHAPTER L.

CARRIE'S LETTER.

ONE bright spring morning, about five months after the events detailed in the last chapter, Sister Caroline might have been seen "on household cares intent"—carefully examining the house-linen, and laying aside such articles as needed mending.

The sun shone brightly in at the open window, and seemed reflected in the sweet face of the novice. Her step was light and active, her eyes a very "home" of smiles; and, as was her wont, she hummed a joyous hymn softly to herself as she worked.

The linen-room looked out on the Sisters' Garden, and now and then as she passed the window the novice looked thoughtfully on the spring blossoms which glowed in the flower-beds below. In the hawthorns, rich with "scented snow;" in the golden laburnums, and fragrant lilacs, the "chorister birds" poured one unceasing song of praise.

"All Thy works praise Thee, O LORD," sang the young novice; "and Thy Saints give thanks unto Thee;"—"Thy Saints!" the

girl paused a moment in her work, and her lips formed these words, though no sound came from them, "And I also, O LORD, the meanest, the least of all Thy creatures. Oh, what reward can I give unto the LORD for all the benefits that He hath done unto me?"

"Sister Caroline," said a voice at the door. Carrie turned; the portress stood there with a letter in her hand. She was going her rounds delivering the letters brought by that morning's post to the various inmates of the Home. "Here is a letter for you," said she.

"For me,—impossible! Nobody writes to me but Sophy Seabright, and I had a letter from her only yesterday."

"It is for you, nevertheless," replied the portress. "Here is the direction: 'Miss Saunders,' as large as life."

"'Miss Saunders!' who can write to me so nonsensically?"

"You'll find out if you open the letter, may be," said the portress dryly; and dropping the letter on the table she left the room.

"'Miss Saunders,' and a handwriting I never saw before; this is quite mysterious," said the light-hearted girl to herself.

She took it up, and examined the postmark: that was "Kirkminster."

"I know no one in Kirkminster; no one, that is, well enough for them to write to me. I shall not open it; I shall give it to Sister Alice. Perhaps it is a hoax, or a letter I ought not to have."

Thus reflecting, she turned it over and over again, but no further light seemed to dawn upon it; so, oh, rare prudence! she put it in her pocket, and went on with her business as before.

"My Mistress," said she afterwards to Sister Alice, "I know no one in Kirkminster at all likely to write to me, and as 'Miss Saunders' too,—will you open this letter and see from whom it is?"

"From 'F. M'Crae,'" replied the Mistress of the novices, doing as she was asked.

"I never even heard of such a person," exclaimed Carrie, in great surprise. "Is it a man or a woman, my Mistress?"

"It is—" began the Mistress, glancing over the letter.

Then she paused, and turned on Carrie a look so startled that the girl cried out in fear, "Oh, Sister, is it bad news? What can it be! oh, tell me, please tell me, dear Sister."

"Read it, my love, it concerns you only. Carrie, my child, this letter is from—your mother."

Carrie took it in a state of utter bewilderment. The words seemed to swim before her eyes. From her mother! The mother who had deserted her so many years ago! Did her heart then smite her for that cruel wrong? Were these words of love to her almost stranger-child?

This was the letter :

" *Kirkminster,*

" *May 1st.*

" MY DEAR CAROLINE,

" Circumstances compelled me some years ago to leave Kirkminster, my family and my home. Circumstances which no one has any right to judge, but which, I dare say, have been grossly misrepresented to you. You were very young at the time, and, of course, could know nothing about them. I have lately returned to England. Being a widow I have married a most excellent man, Mr. M'Crae. I need scarcely say how I have sought for my daughter everywhere. It was a great shock and a surprise to me to find that your grandmother had placed you under the care of *Sisters*. Of course I am obliged to those persons for taking care of you, but your place is with your mother, and I now write to desire you to join me *immediately*, and with no more delay than is necessary to pack up your clothes. Mr. M'Crae, who is goodness itself, is anxious to receive you as a daughter. You will be good enough to come to me *at once*. I am staying in Kirkminster, with that esteemed gentleman, Mr. Fox Adderly.

" Your affectionate mother,

" F. M'CRAE."

Carrie read the letter to the end; but when she came to the name of Mr. Fox Adderly, she exclaimed, "It must be a hoax, my Sister; this is some plot of Mr. Adderly's. He remembers, perhaps, that I was taken down to Kirkminster to be a witness in Jemima's business,—oh, it never can be true," she added eagerly, as if anxious to convince the Sister as well as herself,—"*do think, my Sister, all these years we have never heard a word of my mother, never knew where she was even—*" she paused, and her voice faltered as her eye rested again on the letter. Had there been one word of sorrow or tenderness after those long years of desertion the girl's loving heart would have known no doubt. But the hard, cruel words chilled and terrified her, and when Sister Alice remarked, "My dear, I scarcely think that Mr. Adderly, bad as he is, would have dared to contrive so base a fraud," Caroline sank on her knees with a cry of woe, and throwing her arms round the Mistress, exclaimed, "You will not, cannot let me go,—your poor deserted child. This is my home,—I have no other. My Mother, my Sisters, all are here! I cannot, will not go!"

"Hush, child," said the Sister gravely. "No novice of St. Mary's may ever say 'I will not' to anything which the will of God requires of her."

"But this cannot be His will," replied the girl in a low, awe-stricken tone. "He cannot will that I should leave His Sanctuary and His work to which I have dedicated myself, and go out into the world and live with those who are—who are—who do not love Him, and—" here her tears burst forth unrestrainedly, "*who do not love me.*"

"Ah, my poor darling," said the Mistress, smiling sadly, as she folded her tenderly in her arms, "perhaps if you searched your own heart narrowly you might discover that it is because it shrinks from that last trial that you feel this unexpected blow so sorely. But I think the Father is here, let me take this letter to him. His counsel and opinion are worth more than mine. If I go at once I shall catch him before he leaves, and whilst I am gone, do you wait in the chapel, and ask for a will perfectly conformed to that which you have vowed to follow."

Carrie clung to her, answering only by her tears.

"Kneel before the altar," continued Sister Alice, gently disengaging herself, "and with all your heart repeat the 143rd Psalm."

And Carrie went trembling and weeping to the chapel, and did as she had been advised, and tried to fix her thoughts, and prevent herself watching for every footfall that might be that of the Sister returning to tell her her fate. But her thoughts wandered sadly; she felt sick and faint. The idea of falling into Mr. Adderly's power, or the power of any one connected with, or influenced by him, bewildered her with dread. And then the past rose up before her;—her dying father bowed down by grief and shame;—her grandmother's lingering sorrow and misery;—Sister Katharine coming like an Angel of Mercy to tend and comfort the sick woman and care for the forsaken orphan;—and then the happy years she had spent in this home of love and peace.

"So many years," sighed she, "no one can say it is not my home. Oh, it cannot be true that I must leave it, and just when I thought I was going to be here for ever."

Meanwhile the letter was being read and discussed in the Superior's room.

"What an alliance," said Mr. Neville, shrugging his shoulders. "Mr. Fox Adderly, and this abandoned woman! Poor Carrie, poor little girl! she will indeed be a lamb amongst wolves."

"Perhaps the woman is not abandoned now; perhaps she has repented," said the Superior anxiously. "You see she says she has married a Mr. M'Crae, perhaps she is now respectable."

"'Perhaps' it is a second elopement," replied Mr. Neville dryly. "However, respectable or not respectable, the tone of the letter

does not bode much happiness for this poor child. 'That esteemed gentleman' she is staying with is sufficient guarantee for that."

"But must she indeed go, Father?" asked Sister Alice, with emotion. "After having left her for so many years dependent on charity can the woman claim her like this at a moment's notice?"

"She *can*, of course," replied the chaplain; "Carrie is under age; and you may depend upon it that Mr. Adderly hopes to make another 'case' out of this; it would cook very nicely for the daily papers, and this poor child might be made an excellent stalking-horse against St. Mary's."

"But you would not mind that, Father," cried Sister Alice, eagerly. "The Mother would not, I know; and I am sure we Sisters are ready to bear anything,—everything,—that can be said or done against us, rather than this dear child should be given up to these wretched people."

"'Wretched' or not, my Sister," replied the chaplain, smiling at her warmth, "this woman's claim is irresistible. Adderly knows that well enough, and I dare say hopes Carrie may refuse to acknowledge it, or that we may dispute it, that he may come forward as the champion of an afflicted 'Protestant' mother reft of her only child, that has been enticed away from her for purposes of perversion. Oh, you do not know how nicely it would read in the papers. It seems almost a pity, by yielding Carrie quietly, to spoil so charming a romance."

"But must you indeed yield her?" repeated Sister Alice, in dismay.

"We must indeed," said Mr. Neville, sighing.

"There is yet one means we might try," said the Superior, the tears standing in her eyes as she spoke. "We should not I think be doing our duty by the poor girl, who has been to us as our own child, if we made no effort to save her from such a future as that letter indicates. This woman being a mother must have, one would think, some tender feelings. I will appeal to them, I will write to her. I will represent to her how completely Carrie has become domesticated here, how entirely she realises that this is her home, and what a trial it would consequently be to her to leave it. And I will invite her to come and see Carrie, and talk it over with her:" she moved towards her writing-table as she spoke.

"You can, of course, do all that if you like," observed Mr. Neville, "but I should very much doubt the effect of your eloquence opposed to Mr. Fox Adderly's."

"We shall see," said the Superior, mending her pen deliberately.

A tap at the door arrested her proceedings.

The portress appeared, her eyebrows elevated, and her eyes wide open with surprise.

"If you please, my Mother," said she, "a person has come, who calls herself Mrs. M'Crae. She says she has come to fetch away 'Miss Saunders'—our Carrie," added the portress by way of explanation, "and Mr. Adderly is with her: they are in the parlour, and there's a Kirkminster fly waiting at the door!"

"Mrs. M'Crae has anticipated your invitation," said Mr. Neville, turning to the Superior, who was leaning back in her chair absolutely gasping with dismay. "Go and try your eloquence upon her now; Sister Alice shall accompany you as a counterpoise to Mr. Adderly; and I will wait here to learn the result."

Having relieved their feelings by various exclamations of astonishment and consternation, the Superior and Sister Alice set off to receive their visitor. The portress stood gaping after them with the door in her hand.

"Sister Mary Anne, can you hear the call-bell in the chapel?" said Mr. Neville to her.

"Yes, my Father," replied she.

"Then go to the chapel whilst the Mother is in the parlour, and pray for 'our Carrie,' as you call her. These people are come to take her away. The woman is her mother, who, I dare say you remember, deserted her husband and child some thirteen or fourteen years ago. Go and pray for this poor girl. The future is very dark for her. But mind, do not pray that she may be left here, but simply that whatever happens may be sanctified to her, and that her soul may abundantly profit thereby."

"I will go this very minute, Father," replied the Lay Sister, eagerly, "and I'll pray exactly as you bid me. But for all that," said she to herself as she entered the ante-chapel, "I *shall* ask too that she may stay here, for the idea of her going away with that woman and that man is enough to make one creep."

And the sight of Carrie sobbing bitterly, and so absorbed in her grief that she did not hear Sister Mary Anne's entrance, so greatly confirmed the good portress in this opinion, that it is to be feared she did not follow the Chaplain's directions quite as closely as he had intended.

CHAPTER LI.

THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD.

ABOUT an hour afterwards, Sister Mabel, who had been sent for, joined the Mother, Sister Alice, and the Chaplain, in the Superior's room.

The Superior, usually so mild, could scarcely tell her tale for indignation.

"And there is no hope, no respite?" inquired Sister Mabel.

"Hope—none;—a respite—well, yes, after a fashion; these people are gone now, but they are coming to-morrow, at noon, to fetch her. I procured thus much grace by representing the impossibility of getting any suitable clothes ready in so short a time; and as I positively forbade her going away in the Novice's habit, and they could scarcely take her to Kirkminster in her chemise, I have gained this little delay for her, poor child. It will give her time to become soothed and quieted, and an opportunity for a last Communion. Who can tell when she may have another."

"Who indeed!" echoed Sister Mabel with a sigh.

"Will you go to her now, Father?" continued the Superior, "I bade her wait for you in the sacristy."

"Has she done crying?" asked Mr. Neville.

"Oh, yes, I made that the condition of your coming to her. You need not be afraid of any 'scenes,'" she added, smiling; "if she cries any more whilst you are with her, it will be so quietly, that you will be scarcely aware of the fact. But there are days and nights of weeping for her in store, I fear," continued she to Sister Mabel as the Chaplain left the room.

"You can imagine nothing more hard and heartless than this woman's manner when I brought Carrie in to her. She did not kiss her, but worked herself up into a passion at once,—said she 'would stand no nonsense,' that she was 'not to be put down by a pack of Puseyites,' and a great deal more of the same kind. Poor Carrie stood trembling and as white as a sheet, but when the man Adderly came up to her, and tapped her under the chin, and made coarse jokes about getting her a husband, she became hysterical; whereupon he turned to Mrs. M'Crae, and begged her to observe that this was an example of what he had always maintained, and G. O. B. had recently asserted in a letter to 'The World,' that 'Puseyism' and Sisterhoods induced hysterics, and generally ended in aberration of mind."

Sister Mabel laughed, but rather bitterly. "Did that make poor Carrie worse?" she asked.

"No, indeed, the aspersion on 'Puseyism' and Sisterhoods brought her to, and she became outwardly calm. But she is sadly scared and upset, poor child. I wonder what will become of her!"

Meantime the Chaplain had done his best to soothe and cheer the frightened girl. She had made her confession, and was kneeling now before him, listening to his counsel. But presently raising her tearful eyes with a sad and startled expression to his, she interrupted him by asking suddenly, "Father, tell me,—do you think this which has come upon me is a sign that my offering of myself has been rejected?—that I had deceived myself—that I had no"—she caught her breath with a sob—"no vocation?"

"What do you mean by 'no vocation,' my child?"

"That I was unfit—unworthy."

"Who is worthy?" asked the Priest. "'Vocation,' I thought you knew, means the voice or calling of God. I think this possibly a sign that the Voice you would follow calls you away from St. Mary's, would give you other work to do, after some other fashion elsewhere. In that sense your 'vocation' may be said not to be here."

"Oh, but that is terrible," cried the young novice, clasping her hands, "that is what I feared. Then I am rejected—then the offering I made of myself—all that I am—and all that I have—has not been accepted!"

"I should say the very contrary, my child; I should say that this trial of going forth unfriended into a dark and unknown future was a proof how completely your offering had been accepted."

"Father, how can that be?"

Her sweet face was raised to his; her soft, blue eyes fixed on him with an anxious, imploring gaze. She looked so tender and fragile, so utterly unfit to bear harshness and persecution! He thought of his own child, his Mary, now motherless, and his heart yearned over the worse than motherless child now before him. He laid his hand in blessing on her head, and prayed a few moments in silence over her; then he said, "My child, when you took the habit, was it your intention to embrace the Cross, or shun it?"

"To embrace it, Father," replied she, wondering.

"But you have told me that here your days flowed on in one unbroken stream of happiness: that, loving and beloved, your life here—your work here—seemed to you like a foretaste of Heaven: that you had not an earthly wish beyond."

The tears streamed down her cheeks, she could not speak, but nodded her assent.

"Where was the Cross, my child?"

"The Cross, Father?"

"Ay. What words were those you said to me when I gave you the habit? 'I had rather be poor, and lowly, and despised with CHRIST.' And did you not declare your readiness to give up your will, to cease to dispose of yourself, and to do or suffer anything the Heavenly Bridegroom might ordain for one who was professing to give up all—even her very life, if need be, for His sake?"

As the old man paused for a reply, she murmured "Yes," still wondering.

"Well, then, my child, why do you grieve because you have been taken at your word—because you are commanded to leave that which is to you a peaceful, happy home; because you have been bidden, as it were, to 'get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, your Mother and Sisters in CHRIST,—and from thy FATHER'S House, into a land—unto another dwelling-place, about which you know nothing yet—but which the LORD will show thee?' Can we be said to have made an offering in earnest, if we grudge being taken at our word?"

The novice's pale cheek flushed, she caught his meaning now.

"But, Father, I never thought—" she began, then paused.

"Thought what, my child?"

"Thought, that when I said I would leave all for Him, that I should be required to leave Him too,—to depart out of His House—to give up His service."

"'Heaven is My Throne, and the Earth is My Footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest? Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, Whose Name is Holy! I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' If a humble and contrite heart is the House and Temple of the Most High, if He dwells with the lowly, and is always at hand to revive and refresh them, can any one force you to leave Him, my child? Because He says, 'Come out from this too quiet, too peaceful home, and fight for Me on the great battle-field of the world—come out and endure hardness as a good soldier of JESUS CHRIST'—is that being required to give up His Work?"

"Oh, Father, no," and the girl's eyes kindled.

"Carrie," continued the old man, laying both his hands upon her head, "when Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word,' she had no idea to what she was pledging herself; but it was to share the scorn—the infamy—the agony of the Cross. It was to dwell amongst sinners in the

wicked town of Nazareth—it was to have the finger of scorn pointed at her—it was to nurse her Divine Child in secrecy, fear, and trembling;—and worse, it was to lose the blessing of His sensible Presence—to be separated from Him—to be apparently disowned by Him—‘Who is My Mother?’—not to meet again till at the Cross—to be owned, and acknowledged, only after the sword had pierced through her very soul. Carrie, the Mother of Sorrows *was taken at her word*. Was it a mark that the entire offering she had made of herself was accepted or rejected?”

“Oh, accepted, Father,” cried the young Religious, her whole countenance glowing with enthusiasm, and rising to her feet as she spoke, “I see it now; how foolish I have been! I am accepted!” She stood with clasped hands inwardly praying, and the Priest did not interrupt her. “He left Heaven for me,” she murmured half to herself, “and I have grudged leaving my heaven on earth at His bidding.”

“But, Father,” she added, after a pause, “do I cease to be a Novice of St. Mary’s?” and an expression of anxiety once more marked her countenance, and trembled in her voice.

“Not necessarily, my child,” he answered, “only the novitiate may be, perhaps, not only a very long, but also a very hard one.”

“I do not mind that if only it is my novitiate still,” said she quickly.

“But remember this; a novice may never choose when the novitiate is to cease. Suppose, my child, yours were to end only with your life? That all that time you were exercised in works most distasteful and irksome to you? A novice may not choose her work, you know. And suppose you were condemned to apparent separation from your LORD and Heavenly Spouse, and, seemingly only acknowledged by Him when, like blessed Mary, the sword of agony, or sword of death, had riven your very soul asunder?”

Carrie did not immediately answer. She stood with drooping head, and folded hands, and for some minutes there was deep silence in the little sacristy.

“Father,” said she at length with quivering lips, “you mean—suppose I should never come back to St. Mary’s.”

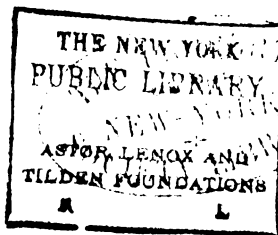
“My child, I do.”

Carrie covered her face with her hands, and the Chaplain saw she was praying earnestly.

When at length she looked up, the fire of enthusiasm, which a little while before had sparkled in her eyes, had given place to an expression of deep and settled purpose, of intense and resolute will. There was no vain confidence, no look of self-sufficiency; humbly

yet confidently she stood, evidently relying on a strength which was not her own.

"Father," she said, in a low deliberate voice, "I have made my offering of my whole self unreservedly to GOD, and I will not take it back. But let Him choose the manner of the sacrifice. 'BEHOLD THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD, BE IT UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.'"



— — — — —

